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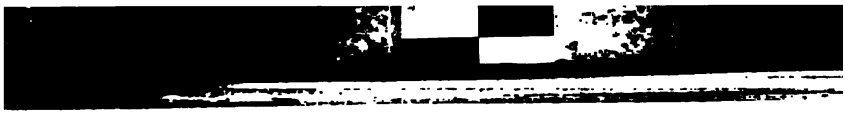
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BAGSBY'S DAUGHTER

BESSIE & MARIE VAN VORST







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See p. 33

"'WHY ARE YOU HERE, ROBERT?'"

By

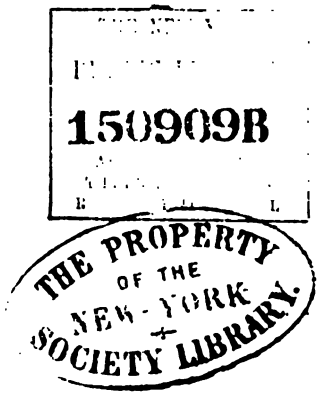
Bessie & Marie van Vorst

Illustrated



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1901





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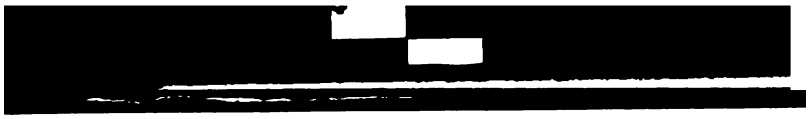




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BAGSBY'S DAUGHTER

Chapter I

THE PROPOSAL

HALIFAX, looking back to the beginning of January 2, 1900, lays his memory's finger on three circumstances which may have been responsible for the luck of his life. He got out of bed on an unaccustomed side. Halfway down-stairs, *en route* to breakfast, he discovered, by reason of an uncomfortable sensation in his left shoe, that his stocking was on wrong side out. At table, speaking to his maiden aunt (who had kept house for him, and because of her all-pervading attention to his various wants made him forget from twenty-five to thirty that he was a bachelor)—in speaking to Miss Halifax, Robert said: "I shall never meet the '*perfect She*,' aunt," and, with a sudden dread lest Fate

should take him at these words, he rapped on the table and cried, "*Unberufen!*"

"Robert! Superstitious?" laughed his aunt.

"About *Her* I never take any risks," he replied, and from that day Halifax has been a symbolist.

The stocking, the bed, and the German good-luck word joined hands and made a magic circle around him.

He left his house an hour earlier than usual, thereby missing a telegram which, received, would have taken him out of Chicago for the day. At his club he found a note which his aunt had sent all over town to find him. It was marked "very important." Halifax smiled at its dash and haste. How well he knew those "*very importants*," "*in hastes*," and "*please forwards.*" Victoria Belford's individuality was in every letter. The trend of the epistle shone through them.

"Will you please meet me at Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's at five o'clock?" thus ran the note, and Robert, after making his most exquisite toilet, in the height and closest struggle of fashion, went to fulfil the command. He went to fulfil the note's command, but it cannot be said that he flew! He no longer took



joyful wing to places where he was sure to see Mrs. Amos Belford. Before he went to Mexico, weeks had elapsed during which he had not crossed her threshold. Her letters to him in Grimshorn lay in neat piles of threes and fours; his to her lay locked away in her secretary, to the count of two.

To-day there was new freedom in the fresh winter air. Halifax, returned from weeks of undisturbed mental labor, from a happy exile in the wilds of an almost savage country, felt, on this day, swept clear of a past. He hurried along through the streets—a tall, alert figure, head well up. "My friendship for *her*," he said to himself, "has been—and it shall be no more—a bondage! I have been freer than I knew; to-day I belong absolutely to myself."

As he affirmed this, he was, with pleasing inconsistency, briskly walking towards a *rendezvous!* Meanwhile he missed a telephone message to his club to the effect that "Mrs. Belford had a bad headache, couldn't go to Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's, and would Mr. Halifax please come to her house instead."

Mrs. Crawford-Crawford, a Chicago *North Side* dazzling light, was giving a musicale in a very large house to a very few people (the

comfort of which arrangement will be at once perceived).

The musicians were hidden behind palms and orange-trees in the music-room. A few guests sat near them, a few others were scattered in the drawing-room, and to the left, across the hall, stretched Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's *chef-d'oeuvre*, so far as her house's interior was concerned—the library in crimson leather and gold. It was to-day quite deserted.

Halifax observed on entering that Mrs. Belford was late. She was one of those persons who can't be overlooked even in a crowd. To-day she would have starred the rooms, but her stunning figure was not to be seen among Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's guests.

As Halifax made his way to the lady of the house he saw she was talking in a confidential whisper to a slender girl, who bent towards her hostess with the grace of youth. Mrs. Crawford-Crawford greeted Halifax cordially, warmly, with unmistakable liking. "I'm so glad you're back—so glad—and, Miss Bagsby," holding the young lady by the arm, "I want you to know Mr. Halifax. He is my *very* best friend. I never do anything that I can help without him."



Miss Bagsby smiled sweetly, and was charmed to meet Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's best friend. She said so, with a pretty nod and apparent sincerity, and Halifax, seizing his hostess's words, vowed that if *he* could arrange it, Miss Bagsby should repeat them, and from thenceforth "never do anything" without *him* again.

To this introduction and meeting the Hungarian orchestra (monopolizing at the moment the programme) wailed forth a feeling bar or two. Miss Bagsby had a musical score in her hand, and Mrs. Crawford-Crawford turned to give her smiling greeting to a new-comer. Before Halifax could exchange any words with Miss Bagsby, she had disengaged herself, walked out of the drawing-room to the library, and, ensconcing herself in a crimson leather chair, she bent intently over her book of music. Robert followed her and paused in the doorway of the drawing-room, unobservedly staring, frankly astonished at himself, but more and more sincere and determined in his resolve at every glance.

The Hungarians were unwinding a labyrinth of twisted, tangled sounds, crying and beseeching, stimulating and impelling. Halifax had heard of the extraordinary hypnotism of this music, how that in Hungary the leader

will sometimes choose one hearer for his especial influence, mesmerizing and possessing him until the listener has no will but the player's. Every fibre of Halifax that was not listening to the weird harmony of discords was quivering to the influence of the lovely little creature of whose existence five minutes ago he had been unconscious.

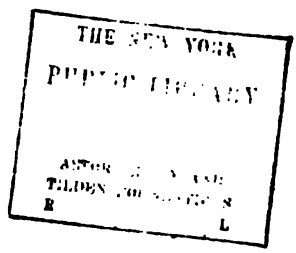
Miss Bagsby was well and richly dressed. She was all in gray, in light, exquisite gray, black hatted, and through her veil he saw her delicate features and brilliant coloring. In her dress she wore an enormous bunch of double violets. Bending over the score with parted lips, she followed the number on the programme.

"If she can make anything from that jargon of sound she is a genius," thought Halifax. Then he gave a determined look at her undoubted beauty and made a memorable decision. "*That woman shall be my wife,*" he said to himself—to his heart, to his mind—and was quite willing to say it to the select few hearers, to the gracious hostess, and to the Hungarians, had they cared a straw to hear. He was ready to telephone it to Victoria and bear the consequences. He was ready to inform his aunt, and hear her say, "Bless you,



"ROBERT FOLLOWED HER AND PAUSED IN THE DOORWAY"




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Bobby!" For his audience, however, he decided on the girl herself. He softly stepped across the hall to the library and approached Miss Violet Bagsby. She half looked up, half didn't, but her pencil ceased to follow the score.

"Miss Bagsby," asked the intruder, "do you know the view of the lake from that window at the end of the room?"

"No," she said, "but isn't this *motif* beautiful?"

"It doesn't compare to this view," said Halifax. "Won't you let me show it to you?"

"I suppose, since you have made me lose several bars"—she gave a discouraged little gesture—"I might as well throw over the whole movement. Let us go, if you like," and she rose.

Halifax, leading the way, guided her to the window.

"There, isn't that stunning?" and he threw out his hand with a convincing presentation of the miles of water before their eyes as if he were displaying an artificial lake he had had made especially for this moment's decoration.

And then he withdrew his eyes from nature and looked steadily and seriously at the girl.

"Miss Bagsby," he said, "will you be my wife?"

Violet Bagsby was too startled to start. She was simply petrified, and she turned upon him her gaze that had just said regarding the lake, "I find you nice to look upon," and her expression had not altered before it fell on Robert Halifax. As she stared at him, Miss Bagsby found that she had no reason to change her approving verdict.

"Since you have brought me here to insult me—Mr. Halifax—"

"Oh!" he gasped. "Insult you!"

"To insult me, you won't think me capricious if I leave you," and she turned as though to go.

But Halifax placed himself in front of her. Just here Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's introduction flashed across the young girl's mind. Mrs. Crawford-Crawford was the leader of Chicago society. "My best friend," she had said, etc., etc. The extraordinary stranger standing before her was pale and serious, calm and determined, and quite the best-looking man Miss Bagsby had ever seen. All this and something more kept her from running like a flash past him and out of the room.

"It must seem as you say," he was continuing, "of course. It *must* seem an insult. If I had known you even a month it would be an honor, for it is the highest tribute any



man can pay a woman to ask her to be his wife."

"Are you really going to *make* me listen to you?" she queried.

"Yes, I am," he returned, determinedly. "The moment I looked at you I vowed that you should be my wife, and I have brought you here to say what I have never said to a woman before. I have brought you here to tell you what it has taken me years to want and to desire—I brought you here to say that from the moment I looked at you I knew that I loved you, and that I should love you forever. I make no apologies and no explanations. It would be impossible, for I do not understand it myself. It is a something beyond me, higher than I am. It is the first thing about myself that I have not been able to analyze and understand, and therefore," said Halifax, "according to my faith it must be the nearest divine that I have ever known. I can support you; I have a decent business, or profession—not too bad a reputation; I love you, and I ask you to marry me."

The girl by this was looking at him intently, and with a perception that the extraordinary moment was making the quintessence of keenness. She flushed and paled.



"I sail, just two weeks from to-day, for London. I have not long to woo, and I shall never ask you again. I don't know your first name," he said, "but you wear my favorite flowers. Violet, will you be my wife?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and started with amazement. "*Violet?* Why, that *is* my name. How could you guess it?"

"Love," Halifax gently said.

From the other room came the insistent tones of the barbaric music, climbing, bar by bar, higher, impelling, imploring. From the other room came the figures of Mrs. Crawford-Crawford and a man.

Violet Bagsby has never been able to explain that quarter of an hour, whether it was all Halifax, or a little of the Hungarian bewitching, or the sudden apparition of Patterfield West, that decided her life for her, but when once again Halifax asked, "Will you marry me?" with a little slow inclination of her head, "Yes," she said, then looked at him quickly and past him to the new-comers, smiling at Mrs. Crawford-Crawford.

"Oh, Mrs. Crawford-Crawford," cried the affianced bride, "have you been looking for me?"



Halifax turned like a pivot to face the others.

"No, dear, but Mr. West *has*," and the hostess presented the men. "I thought I saw you coming in here with your score."

The two men regarded each other with suspicion. Halifax felt as though he had been caught out of deep waters by a successful line and swung up into the air. He was going to land he knew, and on a soft bank, still he felt dizzy.

"I *did* come to follow the score," admitted the pretty girl.

"And I to follow Miss Bagsby," smiled Halifax.

"And we plead the same intent," said Patterfield West.

"Suppose"—Mrs. Crawford-Crawford took Miss Bagsby affectionately by the arm—"suppose you all follow me instead, and come back to the drawing-room, for I want you to hear Herr Freischütz's violoncello."

The four retraced their steps.

For a second a torturing thought flashed through Halifax's mind. The girl had taken this means of getting rid of him; she had accepted him in order to protect herself. This was most easy to fear, as he saw her turn to

Patterfield West with a good comradeship and friendly intimacy.

"Violet, there are dear Mr. and Mrs. Bagsby," said Mrs. Crawford-Crawford. "I must speak to them," and she hastened her steps.

"Won't you take me, too?" asked Halifax. "I want to meet Mr. Bagsby very much."

"Meet him you shall, Robert." Mrs. Crawford-Crawford linked her arm in her best friend's. "Mr. Bagsby is the salt of the earth."

Violet and Patterfield West fell behind.

"I am going to meet your father and mother," said Halifax over his shoulder, meaningly.

Miss Bagsby smiled, but made no other reply, and Robert, who, in his haste and determination, rose that day to something like real greatness, swam along by Mrs. Crawford-Crawford through the rooms to the port where his future father and mother in law were anchored, two peaceful ships.

"*Camden G. Bagsby!* my dear boy," informed his hostess; "don't you know?"

"Bagsby!" murmured Robert. "Not—" and he held her a little back—"not '*Bagsby's Bronchitis Capsules*'!"

"Yes, the same—millions, millions, millions."



"Oh!" gasped Robert. "*Capsules!*"

"Why not?" laughed his friend. "All taste disguised — brisk, beneficial. They slip down, my dear, if they *are* bulky, and you know the gelatine is *pure metal*—no alloy, and—such quantities of it!"

As they slowed up before the Bagsbys, Halifax saw what quantity there was of *them.*

"Then," continued Mrs. Crawford-Crawford, almost under the paternal ear, "she is *so* pretty—Violet—isn't she? And you don't have to *marry* her, you know."

"Why not?"

Halifax's tone was unusual, and Mrs. Crawford-Crawford looked at him. "You are right," she acquiesced, swiftly; "after all, why not? Dear Mrs. Bagsby, let me present Mr. Halifax—and, Mr. Bagsby, this is my very best friend; and you will excuse me if I leave you all together—yes? There are the Lawrence-Sands, of New York; I must go to them."

Robert for the tenth of a second was nonplussed. He wondered whether he had better speak in adulation of the capsules, and say he "used no others," or whether to blurt out the sentimental truth, as he had roman-

tically made his declaration to the daughter, or tell the old gentleman how sorry he was to learn that Violet was an heiress.

Mrs. Bagsby regarded him with the sweet smile that expresses perfect confidence that the other person will begin the conversation. Mr. Bagsby had a theory that people shouldn't talk when music was playing, and Herr Freischütz was playing his fifty-dollar-an-hour best. So Robert, after warmly shaking hands with the millionaire Capsule King, and smiling confidingly to Mrs. Bagsby, said nothing at all. He stepped a little back by Bagsby's side, overshadowed by the elder man's great bulk, and watched Violet and Patterfield West talking together near the door, and prayed to all the gods he knew that Victoria would be later and later. As though his prayer invoked her, she sailed in, magnificently pale, as only Victoria Belford could be and remain handsome. She swept a glance around and brushed Halifax with it, nodded to Mrs. Crawford-Crawford, then beckoned to Halifax commandingly. Here Robert pushed himself forward.

"Mr. Bagsby, I am charmed," he murmured, "perfectly delighted to meet you. I have a little affair of great importance to—ah—con-



sult you about. Could I, might I call to-night at your house to see you?"

"Why, yes," whispered Bagsby, hoarsely and politely, "at eight, No. 18 Michigan Avenue," and the healer of thousands of bronchial tubes fumbled for his card, which he pressed into Halifax's hand. Halifax grasped his hand tenderly, thanked him, bowed, and answered Victoria's beckon. He stood like so much rock, however, when he reached her side, resenting her evident lead to the library.

"Well," she questioned, "why didn't you come?"

"But I did."

"You did? Why, they never told me you were there."

"Where?"

"Why, at my house, of course. Where do you mean you *came?*"

"Why, here," said the dazed Halifax. "I came *here* at five, as you said."

"Robert!" said Mrs. Belford, "are you crazy?"

"Yes," he returned, meekly, "violently insane."

"I am glad you are aware of it—then there is hope of a cure."



"No," her companion shook his head, "no hope, Victoria, and don't attempt it."

She stared at him through her lorgnette, and ignored what she didn't understand. "Didn't you get my message at the club?"

"I got your letter, sent after me, to come here at five."

"Hideous blunder," she drawled, "but never mind. It resulted in my coming out when I wasn't well enough to leave the house."

Halifax regarded her with mingled feelings. "But why did you come, then?"

"I came to see where you were, my dear Robert. I came and saw. You are a clever and amusing man, but if you have reached the point where you prefer to retire behind the avoirdupois of a quack medicine man and stand silent staring into space, instead of sitting in my drawing-room with *me*, why—" and she waved her hand.

"Why, what?" laughed Robert.

"Why, I shall call it *paresis* instead of *mania*. Violent insanity has at least some excitement about it; this is pitiful." Mrs. Belford bent on her late slave her very handsome eyes. "Pathetic, my dear boy; I shall rescue you."

"Victoria, you are the soul of charity."



"And charity," mused the lady, tenderly, "has another name. Let us go into the library."

"Oh, no," parried the uneasy Halifax, for Violet and Patterfield West had come rather nearer, and were seated on a divan not far off. "No, I promised Mrs. Crawford-Crawford that I would bring you to her at once you came. She wants you to know the Lawrence-Sands."

Mrs. Belford actually gasped. "You promised to *dispose of me!* My dear boy, your malady has a revelation every minute! I see that I shall be very much interested in its diagnosis. There are Lily and the Lawrence-Sands by the tea-table. Take me over to them if you like." Her glance, when it made the circuit of the room, had comprehended Violet.

"Who," she said to Mrs. Crawford-Crawford, "is that little provincial?"

The lady shrugged. "Is there one?"

"Decidedly. 'A pretty little violet beside a mossy stream,'" she quoted, stirring her tea and smiling comprehensively at the Lawrence-Sands, her hostess, and her friend. She was unmistakable.

"She must *look* her name, exhale it even,"



said Halifax, easily, "for you have guessed it. It is Violet."

"Ah!"

"Violet Bagsby," informed Mrs. Crawford-Crawford.

Victoria shuddered gently. "Bagsby! My dear! And she is *a little pill*, then."

"She looks," said Mr. Lawrence-Sands, who had grinned and regarded appreciatively, "as though she might be a little appetizer, and even the children might cry for her."

"Please," said Halifax, quietly. "Your wit is so dazzling and flashing that I scarcely distinguish its pattern. It makes me think of fireworks that ought to reveal a design and are only a scatter of sparks."

"Gad!" laughed Lawrence-Sands, "how severely personal you are. My dear chap, let me assure you that as far as *I* am concerned, my designs are all flowers for the lady. *Violets*, if you must; *daisies* I should have chosen. The little girl is perfectly lovely."

Lawrence-Sands was undoubtedly flattering, and Halifax controlled his desire to spring to his feet and say, "She is to be my wife, sirs and madams." He thought, for Violet's sake, discretion was the best gift for this moment's need.



"Do you know her?" asked Mrs. Belford, in spite of herself, to Robert.

"I have just met her." He looked at her full in the eyes, puzzling, troubling her.

"Oh," she breathed, under the cover of the conversation that the others were pursuing. "Oh! 'violently insane'—I see, I see." She pushed the lemon in her tea from side to side with her spoon, and when she spoke again she spoke down into the cup, her pale cheek reddening. "*Robert Halifax, I shall never let you go.*"

Chapter II

"P. W."

CAMDEN G. BAGSBY was of an immense physique, but his huge, well-covered frame could have stowed itself comfortably away in one corner of his heart, leaving the rest for the companion of his life and labors, for his children, and for all the world at large which was in any way below par or in need of sympathy. There was a sense of present protection and rising hope for the future which every one felt in Bagsby's presence. He had made a fortune, not by sleight of hand, not by shady transactions, not by blackening each obstacle that stood in his way, but by putting pure, good stuff on the market, stuff that was "worth something," Camden affirmed, "beside its advertisin' reputation," a simple medicine whose ingredients had not been allowed to deterioriate as its fame increased.

Bagsby had found the happy combination almost by accident, and he was very confident



it was the approving hand of the Lord which had indicated the golden way to him early in life. He had been head clerk in one of the north Wisconsin town stores for several years, when an increase in his salary transformed a long-cherished dream into a reality, and Camden G. Bagsby was able to make Emeline Munger, of Spooneyville, his wife and bring her up north with him to "locate" a home. Having always been accustomed to the mild and balmy atmosphere of Spooneyville, a few months of Wisconsin blizzards and whirlwinds served to give Mrs. Bagsby an attack of bronchitis so severe as to become a subject of conversation at meetings and social gatherings. Bagsby determined to cure it. *"I'll find something to get you rid of that cough, Emmie, dear, as sure as I'm alive."* The remedy in time revealed itself to his nocturnal researches; the bronchitis yielded, and the capsules instead of the cough made the subject of conversation in the town parties. Spooneyville naturally got wind of the new patent medicine, and inside of a year it was the source of bewildering income to Bagsby. The money rolled up; the town where he built his factories took its name from his; the great Northwestern landscape became a mere back-

ground for gigantic colored sign-posts, and the successful merchant set aside one-third of his capital for Mrs. B., considering her the indirect originator, the inspirer of his fortunes, because of her "bronchial attack" in the winter of '79.

Mr. and Mrs. Bagsby took their leave of Mrs. Crawford-Crawford somewhat in advance of Violet, who was "having such a good time they hated to disturb her." The capsule magnate opened the carriage door for his wife, forgetting the footman, who had always seemed to him a superfluous member of the household; this latter sprang on to the box and explained to the coachman that he was to return for Miss Violet at seven.

"Can't say I care much for those afternoon affairs," Bagsby began, settling back in the luxurious landau.

"A little music's never out of place at any time," said his wife.

"Perhaps not, but that head fiddler there carried it too far. You'd have thought he was sawing up wood for the winter the way he went at his fiddle."

"Wasn't Vi a picture?" Mrs. Bagsby asked.

"Not's pretty as her mother was at twenty."



"Oh, Camden Bagsby, you know better than that."

Mrs. Bagsby had received subtle compliments of the kind for twenty years, always protesting and always pleased. She was so thoroughly kind herself she saw only kindness in those about her. "Just give folks a chance," was her argument in favor of all who fell short of her standard. She could not be more indulgent than to judge others by her generous self. Her principles were improvised on experience: she was sure knowledge how to "act right" would come as the occasion to act presented itself, and confident that words could do little to help along any situation.

Bagsbyville had suited the Bagsbys to perfection until Violet returned from the fashionable Eastern boarding-school to which she had been sent for a number of years, and then they decided (after much deliberation and planning, done when their daughter was away, lest she should suspect her parents were making a sacrifice on her account) that they "would better move down and settle in Chicago." Neither of them ever quite got used to the change from the simplicity of the village life to the complicated demands of a metropolitan



existence, but nothing was said further than an occasional word of gratitude that "the girl should be getting about the best that could be found."

"That young man Mrs. Crawford-Crawford introduced to us this afternoon was Robert Halifax," Bagsby said to his daughter when dinner was over—"young Halifax, the lawyer. I've kept my eye on him right along. I happened to hear him plead in the Hancock bribe case. I said to your mother when I came home that evening, 'That young chap will be heard from.' He has, and we are not done listening yet. He said he had something he wanted I should know. I suppose it's about the works. He's coming in this evening," Bagsby went on, searching through his pocket for a card he could not find.

"Did you ever meet him before?" he asked, turning to Violet, who had risen and was busy with her back to him poking the soft-coal fire. Before he could question her further she turned suddenly, and, holding one hand up long enough for him to see that a speck of soot had darkened her slender finger, she started from the room with a quick movement which carried her to the other side of the portières as the bell rang sharply. She hid a moment in the folds of plush



until the man-servant had opened the door, let Mr. Halifax in, and disappeared to announce him. Then she stole out, and, with a simple frankness that delighted her *fiancé*, she extended both hands to him, saying, in a gentle voice, whose emotion was even more expressive than the words it uttered, "I am so happy." He stooped towards her, but she withdrew and whispered, "Not yet, you may not kiss me yet!" and she was gone. The man-servant again stood before the delirious Halifax, stating that Mr. Bagsby would receive him in the library, whither he allowed himself to be conducted. The capsule merchant was warm in his greeting. He felt well disposed towards Halifax for his strong, broad shoulders and capable appearance, and also because he was young, and Bagsby's youth had been so happy that he took unconscious pleasure in all that suggested to him youth and starting out in the world.

A few words were exchanged about the afternoon's entertainment. Bagsby referred in warm terms of compliment to Halifax's victory in the Hancock bribe case, and then the younger man, feeling every moment he postponed the announcement of his extraordinary mission was claiming courtesy under false

pretences, and eager also to speak, although he dreaded an answer that might mean the ruin of his life's content, began with evident agitation:

"Mr. Bagsby, I have something very serious to ask of you."

"Don't be timid," Bagsby responded, pushing the tray of cigars, cigarettes, matches, and ash-receivers towards Halifax. "Smoke, won't you? If I had made this world, I tell Mrs. Bagsby, I would have made us all equals, so none need feel afraid of the others. Why, I'd rather give up all my success at the works than frighten anybody, Mr. Halifax."

Halifax could have wrung his hand. He laughed and took a cigarette instead, which he rolled and crushed between his fingers without lighting it.

"Timid is not exactly the word which expresses my feelings," he began again. "I am stirred by an emotion which concerns the most serious event that can occur in a man's life."

"Well, there's three things which have been serious events in my life," the manufacturer rejoined, desiring instinctively to put the young man at his ease. "There's my wife," he counted her off on his thumb and forefinger;



"there's my two children," these he named on the next two fingers; "and there's business," there was nothing left for business but one short, fat little finger.

"Well," said Halifax, "I have no business—I am a lawyer; I have no children, for I am not married; and I have no wife, but I love a woman with my whole soul. I want to marry her, and give her everything I have in the world, and I have come to ask your permission to do this. Mr. Bagsby, I love your daughter. I wish to make Violet my wife."

Bagsby was silent so long a time, gazing into the red flames of the fire, that Halifax thought perhaps in his emotion his heart alone had spoken words that his companion could not hear; but at last the father turned towards him his steady eyes, whose tears reflected the room's soft lights, and said, deliberately:

"What does Violet say about this?"

Halifax, who had prepared a host of explanations and excuses, was disconcerted by this one question, direct, simple.

"She said that I might speak to you—she said that she would be my wife." He pronounced the words with pride.

"Vi said 'yes,' did she?" her father asked,

drawing his lips together, and again, after a long pause: "She knows pretty much what's best for her, I guess; Emeline and I always intended to let her fix things up for herself, as we did, but," he added, turning his head towards Halifax, with a movement which carried one of the sparkling tears over his eyelashes and down his round, bearded cheek, "but I never thought it would come so sudden. Of course, I know how you stand in your profession; you're not exactly a stranger to us, and you're acquainted with friends of ours, too. It isn't that I have any fear about you. Only it is so sudden."

"It is terribly sudden, I admit," the suitor hastened to agree. "And I should think any one would be broken-hearted at the very thought of losing Violet even for a little while; but I will be everything to her, Mr. Bagsby, and you will not be losing a daughter, but only getting another son—another pair of broad shoulders to back you up." He went over and took Bagsby's hand in his. Bagsby dared not make much response, for the lump in his throat threatened a total breaking-down of self-control. He shook the young man's hand monotonously back and forth, and then he said:



"I'll go up and tell mother that you young people have fixed things up between you." He rose and disappeared into the hall. Halifax was in a nervous state of excited anticipation and eager intensity. He went over and held his hands towards the warm, cheering blaze on the hearth, and, as he did so, his eyes, wandering about the wealth of bric-à-brac on the chimney-piece, fell upon a note—unfolded, and lying in such a way that he could not but grasp without intention the meaning of its first few sentences. "Violet, dearest, my hope and my reward, I thank God it is my right"—Halifax wrenched himself away from the letter, not without seeing two initial letters, "P. W.," at the bottom of it, which burned themselves into his soul.

A motherly rustling of skirts through the hallway brought him back to the present crisis before him. Mrs. Bagsby's principle of "letting folks have their chance" was too deeply instilled to fail her at so serious a moment. She greeted warmly her suddenly appointed son-in-law. It was with difficulty that he could keep his eyes from the chimney and hold them steadily for her to look into as she said:

"You have given us a surprise!"



Halifax returned her gaze without seeing or hearing.

"It seems you young folks have taken things into your own management. We can't say much, for it's about the way we fixed things up ourselves, Mr. Bagsby and I." She gave a pathetic laugh. "If Violet's made up her mind to say 'yes,' I guess the rest of us 'll follow suit; we generally do."

The answer he had so desired fell dully on his distracted mind. Didn't she know what was in the letter? Was it a huge practical joke? Was it what he deserved for proposing to a woman the hour he met her? Was Violet a coquette, a flirt? Had the ideal of his boyhood been realized for a fleeting moment only to cause him new suffering? These reflections he felt left an awkward pause, and yet he could not speak; the pain in his heart seemed to paralyze his tongue.

"Violet—" Mrs. Bagsby began.

"Yes, Violet"—he seized upon the name—"your daughter, can you let me see her? It is very essential for me to see her—at once!"

"I am real sorry." Mrs. Bagsby appeared embarrassed. "She had an engagement she couldn't get out of to-night. She made it



some time ago, before she expected you. It's a pity."

"Violet was out," he repeated to himself. She had an engagement — an engagement with "P. W.," of course. How did she dare make so light of such a serious matter? His eyes reverted to the note. "Yes," he said, in answer to Mrs. Bagsby, "she could hardly have expected me to-night."

This remark the mother and father followed by a host of questions about the meeting of the young people, Halifax's likes and dislikes, his future plans and past experience, to all of which he responded as by a third person, while he struggled against the belief forced in upon him that his life's happiness had been made a matter for jest. At last, with a frantic effort at cordiality, he got away from the kindly old people, out into the air, where he could think more freely of what step he would next take in the drama whose hero he had suddenly become.



Chapter III

THE BROTHERS-IN-LAW

ROBERT'S aunt, little Miss Halifax, had received the confidence, hugged her nephew, patted him on the back, blessed him, and said with tears that "Miss Bagsby" was the luckiest girl in Chicago. It was 1 A.M. when she bestowed upon her unknown niece this medal of distinction. She had waited up for Robert in her gray flannel dressing-gown, her blue worsted slippers, and her hair in crimps that night bewitched into curls for the daytime. Robert found that after his excitement of the day Miss Halifax acted like a soothing syrup.

"She is pretty," she chirped, "you say?"

"Perfectly lovely."

"I am glad. Only twenty-three?"

"Yes."

"Dear, dear!" said Miss Halifax, though what twenty-three had to do with the sigh she could not have told.



"You take it wonderfully, aunt."

"It took *you* wonderfully, Bobby."

"Yes," said her nephew, "and you are one in a hundred thousand to understand it."

"I know *you*," smiled the dear lady; "you see I brought you up, and I feel I am responsible."

"If you are responsible," said her nephew, "I will kiss you again."

Miss Halifax studied her nephew with a determination to thoroughly read him. "You are pale, Bobby; you are nervous."

"But what do you expect?"

"Radiant happiness—if not now, never."

He was silent. He could not at that moment claim radiant happiness, tortured as he was with the words of the letter jumping before his eyes at every wink of his lids.

"People in Chicago *un*marry in haste," mused Miss Halifax. "Why shouldn't they fall in love in like ratio? But, unless it is a complete union of souls, a true electric love-match, it has *nothing* to recommend it."

Halifax tried to assume the expected lightness of manner. "Oh, it's a *love-match*, of course! Why should she have accepted me otherwise? I am not rich enough, according

to her own income, or celebrated enough, to be a temptation."

"She must make you believe her affection, Robert."

"I do," he stoutly affirmed, "absolutely," and cheered himself with the words.

By this time they had gone down the hall together. Halifax stood at his own door holding the knob, and his gray, slender aunt had her hand on his shoulder. "Bobby," she said, seriously, "I am glad of this for many, many reasons. Will you—have you—shall you see *her?*"

"Yes."

A flush crept up the fine old cheek of the New England virgin. "I have called her dreadful names. I have hated and mistrusted, even condemned her. Poor woman!" said Miss Halifax, gently, "poor woman!"

Robert moved uneasily. "Don't," he said, "think of it, or refer to it again. You have never understood. Haven't I always said that? Pity her if you like, but not for me, or because of me."

"Really, Robert, really?" and Miss Halifax nervously changed the subject. "You must sleep late to-morrow if you can. I won't have you called."



He detained her a moment. "Late as it is, I must write a note; late as it is, I must send it. It is vitally important."

It was late, shockingly, for notes to go their formal rounds, but instead of exclaiming at the evident fact, Miss Halifax smiled. "Write it. I will knock up James myself; he shall take it round to Michigan Avenue right away."

She left him and pattered down the hall in her blue worsted slippers.

"Angel!" murmured Robert Halifax, "angel!" and opened his door and went in. He had been the devoted slave of one woman for ten years. He was desperately in love with another. "Angel!" he said, tenderly, and Miss Halifax, who had never known a lover, was blessed by this ardent one above all women in the world.

The next morning Robert was rudely awakened by a brisk rapping on his door. In his sleepy daze he remembered his aunt's promise that she would not let him be disturbed, and, like all healthy, sound sleepers, he was righteously indignant.

"What the dickens!" he growled, and two voices replied—one the familiar brogue of the housemaid apologizing, and a strange, high-keyed little voice insisting.

"Yez ain't goin' in on him onless he's *warrned*—" (and a protest).

"What's the matter?" demanded Halifax, jumping up and going to the door; he opened it and stood behind its screen.

"Wull, sorr, it's a young gintleman—" and the young gentleman stepped in—a small boy, to whom Halifax in his *dêshabille* was displayed.

"Why, you wear *pajamas*, don't you?" exclaimed the visitor.

"Look here." returned Halifax, severely, and then he did look *there*, himself, and found in the sharp, freckled countenance a familiar pleasant suggestion. The boy looked like—he had a look of—

"Hullo!" cried Halifax, warm as a glow, "you're Violet's brother!"

"Yep," grinned the red, little mouth; "I'm Grove."

"You did perfectly right to come, my dear chap," welcomed his future brother-in-law, enthusiastically, giving him his hand.

"*There!*" taunted the little boy to Bridget; "I told you he'd let me in."

"That's all right," called Halifax to the maid from the shelter of the door; "I will be down to breakfast at once."



"*Breakfast!*" exclaimed Grove, in scorn. "*Lunch* is *my* next meal."

"Why, what time is it?"

"Eleven, I guess," piped the guest. "I've been looking at books and pictures here for two hours most, waiting for you to wake up."

The future brothers-in-law frankly studied each other — Grove with a gray-eyed stare that travelled from Halifax's frowzled head to his slippers; Halifax with an amused furtiveness, and he saw a very small, thin little boy in clothes too big for him, trousers that came bagging down over his knee-caps, black-ribbed stockings twisted around the small legs.

"I've had the mumps," he announced.

Halifax expressed regret.

"It's catching, but *you* needn't be afraid," he assured, kindly; "you couldn't get it now; it's gone on."

"*Gone on?*"

"Yep, to some other fellow. *I'm* all right. I was going to school to-day, but I'm not now."

"No—why not?"

"Oh, I kind o' got out of the habit of going since they kept me home."

Halifax had gone into his dressing-room.

"Sit down, will you?" he called. "We can talk to each other from here."

"Yep," returned the other, agreeably.

"Suppose we have a meal together. I will call it breakfast, and you can call it lunch."

"All right."

"How is Violet?" asked her lover.

"She's all right. Say, how'd you guess me?"

"Why, you look like her."

Grove giggled. "Rats! Violet hasn't got red hair and freckles and no nose."

"No," laughed the splashing Halifax, "that's not her picture."

"That's me, though, and I've got warts, too—one here—and here. Shall I show you?"

"No, no," warned Halifax; "stay where you are."

"All right. Say, can I see you shave?"

"Of course."

"Popper don't shave at all. I've seen barbers, though; and Mr. West don't shave himself."

"Indeed!" cried his host with warm interest. Then he forced himself to silence, for he wouldn't from innocence and ignorance find out anything that might be—*must* be—"P. W."

"Nope," vouchsafed Grove, "*he* don't shave



himself. The Auditorium barber shaves him, and when I grow up I'm going to be him."

"Mr. West?"

Again Grove giggled. "Nope, how mixed you get! The Auditorium barber."

"Heavens! What high-bred instincts!" groaned Halifax. "Why, pray?"

Here he appeared in his shirt and trousers, and went over towards his shaving-stand. But the boy was speechless with interest; he slipped from his chair and approached Halifax with awed attention. Halifax brought in hot water from his dressing-room, and, smilingly regarding the clever little face turned up to him, made his foaming lather right under the student's nose.

"Why do you want to be a barber?"

"The Auditorium one," slowly replied the child. "He sees such lots of people—all the sports and the fakirs and the bunkoes—not many swells—swells generally shave themselves; and he talks and talks, and they have to listen to him—they just say, 'um—um.'"

Halifax's face, covered with lather, was forced to be grave. "How do you know all this?"

"Mr. West took me once. He took me to



the circus; then we went in, and he got shaved, and I watched."

"Indeed!" emphasized his future relation. "Mr. West is one of those swells, I suppose, who doesn't shave himself."

"Yep," admitted Grove.

"I don't approve, old man."

"Hey?"

"I don't approve; I mean to say I think you'd much better be a swell and shave yourself than be a barber."

"Huh! me a swell?"

"A gentleman, then," said the busy Halifax, who was wiping off suds and lather. "Did your sister send me any word?"

"Nope," shook the red head.

Halifax had made his toilet, went to the door and opened it for his guest to pass through. "Let's go down to lunch-breakfast. What gave you the happy idea of coming to see me?"

"Why, mother said for the waiter-man to go, and I said no, let me; so I came."

Halifax stopped still. "They *sent* you, then? Come, old man," and he put a forcible hand on his shoulder, "what did they send you *for?*"

"Jingo!" cried the little boy, and slapped his coat-pocket like a man. "Vi's letter!"



"THE MORNING SUNLIGHT BEAMED ON THE BROTHERS-IN-LAW TO BE"



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Halifax's heart danced and stood still. "Yes," he said, with god-like patience; "where is it?"

Grove, red as his hair, dived into his trousers pockets and turned out his jacket pockets in vain. He looked up piteously to Halifax without excuse.

"Think," commanded the gentleman, "think a little. Are you *sure* you took it?"

Grove nodded.

"Did you carry it in your hand?"

"Nope."

"Then, in—" Halifax controlled himself and was repaid.

"My overcoat!" shrieked Grove, giving him a divine smile that had a ray of his sister's charm, and he tore off down the hall, flinging himself clattering down the stairs. He was back in a second and had not far to come, for Halifax was close on his heels and rescued Violet's letter from her brother. He took his friend's hand and led him into the dining-room. They were alone, Miss Halifax being out on her morning rounds.

"Sit there," pointed the host to the opposite end of the table.

Grove climbed into the arm-chair, and well-nigh disappeared. Halifax faced him. "Give



Master Bagsby some breakfast, will you?" he said to Bridget. "And now, fire away, old man."

The morning sunlight beamed on the breakfast silver and glass, and on the brothers-in-law to be, and the child's red hair and his eager, intelligent face, and on the strong face and blond head of Robert Halifax. Youth and childhood sat at opposite ends of the pretty, cheerful board—one waiting to be old enough to spell out what the other knew by heart. In this innocent atmosphere Halifax broke the seal of his first love-letter from his *fiancée*.

"DEAR ROBERT" (and he liked her the better for her simple address),—"Please come to see me at three to-day. Yours—no one else's—

VIOLET."

"Is it good?" asked Grove.

"Yes, dear boy, very good," answered his *vis-à-vis*, with romantic emphasis.

"Mine ain't," said his guest, severely, with a grimace—"it's salty."

Halifax roared.

"The oatmeal," exclaimed Grove, kindly; "it's salty as the sea."

"I'm awfully sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," reassured the guest;



"I've had it twice for my own breakfast already. I'll eat the buckwheat cakes, you bet, though."

"Do, do," urged Halifax. He looked at his watch. It was nearly mid-day—three hours—a lifetime, and he should know then—he should see her again, and she would explain. She *could* explain, of course, but after his letter of last night, where she must have seen his jealous suffering, why didn't she send him one word of assurance? Women do not realize how men torture themselves. Till three, then—

"Do you like to drive, Grove?" His expression showed that he did. "I'll send for my runabout, and we'll take a turn in the park for a couple of hours. I'll leave you at the house. Telephone to Mrs. Bagsby, Bridget, that I've got the little boy with me, and will bring him home at three—at three, mind."

Chapter IV

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

IT was exactly three when Halifax rang the Bagsbys' bell. Grove, who accompanied him to the door, assured him it was useless to be on time, as Violet kept everybody waiting. He found her, however, in the library by the fire, a book lying open on her knees, and between the leaves his letter of the night before.

She looked flushed and troubled; her eyes moved about restlessly and met his with evident embarrassment. Before she could rise from the deep chair where she was seated, Halifax was by her side and had taken the hand she held out to him in greeting. He had come prepared to storm and demand an explanation, but already he felt reproachful. Could the few words he had written have made this change in the girl who had so suddenly promised to be his wife? Her hands were cold, and they trembled as she closed



the volume before her. Fearing defiance, he had perhaps been more severe than necessary. Surely she had never looked so lovely; her eyes were dark and serious, her breath came quickly with a slight effort that suggested timidity. At last, glancing at him furtively and speaking hurriedly, she said:

"You aren't going to be angry about that letter, are you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Do you suppose," she asked, "that if I had cared anything about it I would have left it around? Do you think it would have been on the mantel-piece if it had been important?"

In spite of feeling more like an inquisitor than a man newly affianced to the most charming woman in the world, Robert was determined to have some clearing-up of his jealous anxiety.

"I trust sincerely it isn't of the least importance," he said, "but why was it written at all? People don't write love-letters without some encouragement. It is most extraordinary that I should find this within a few hours of the time—"

Violet blushed. "Please don't ask me to explain," she interrupted; "I couldn't without being disloyal to some one. Won't you try to have faith in me?"

Halifax smiled, a brief, fleeting smile, which she did not see, as her eyes were fixed upon the rug pattern, whose intricacies she seemed intent upon following out with the point of her slipper.

"Have faith in you?" he asked, tenderly. "I trust you above anybody in the world." There was a long silence. He waited, believing at every moment that she would say something, and fearing to speak lest he should deter her. Meanwhile her embarrassment increased. Her foot stiffened in the soft slipper that held it, she breathed more quickly, the lace which fell loosely over the front of her dress fluttered under the rapid beating of her heart. Halifax was torn between a longing to take her in his arms and quiet her agitation and a rising ire that such agitation should exist.

"Violet!" he said at last, bending towards her.

She looked up and away again at once, lest her eyes should speak more love than she wished to show.

"I *can't* tell you," she whispered. He got up and stood with his hands behind him, his back to the fire. There was another long pause, which she was forced to break, as tears



were fast getting beyond her control. She might have wept before a demonstrative, consoling Robert, but before this cold, distant companion she must remain cold and distant. With a break in her voice which caused her catechiser a pang, she asked:

"What would be the use of trying to explain so long as you don't trust me?"

He was patient with her feminine logic. "I do trust you," he said. "But why, unless there is a reason, do you fear explaining?"

"Because it would be disloyal to some one else."

"And how do you suppose this affects me? You consider some one else's feelings above mine. Isn't it disloyal to me not to explain?"

"I don't think it is," she answered. "I shouldn't think you would want to know. I don't want to know about things in your life. I do know a great deal, too," she added, irrelevantly, with a certain indiscretion to which women feel privileged when they are excited or in trouble. "People have told me things about you, and I suppose they are true, too; but I don't care because you didn't know me when they happened. One thing in particular," she continued, proving by this reversion



how much she cared, "but I haven't asked you for an explanation; I was too happy, I was so sure you loved me better than any one else."

"Dearest," he cried, kneeling by her, "don't say 'I was sure you loved me,' as though it were all over," and, rising, he caught her hands between his and covered them with kisses. He drew her to him, kissing her hair, her eyes, her lips, repeating names of endearment, entreating her to forgive him.

She had meant to be very firm in claiming his trust, but his sudden embrace left her bewildered. In this first meeting of their lips she had given more than any spoken promise. Could she doubt now of his faith in her?

"You do love me?" he murmured.

"Yes."

"Tell me"—he bent his head close to her, and she whispered something to him.

"Darling, my wife." In his voice there was a depth of tenderness, and Violet, blushing, whispered again, "I love you, Robert."

The letter was not further referred to. Seated together on the broad library sofa, they talked of their love, of their new life, their plans for a future in which they were never to be separated; they had a world of sympathy

to exchange for past experiences; Violet told stories of her childhood, which Halifax interrupted with frequent anecdotes of his school-days; they marvelled at the similarity of their tastes and feelings even as children, and wondered still more that, having both lived in Chicago, they should never have met.

"I lost no time when we did meet," laughed Halifax, "and I shall make up now by never letting you out of my sight."

He told of his recent expedition to the Grimshorn mines, where he had lived for months among the roughest set in the west of Mexico, and, as he talked on, stirred by the look of admiration and pride which greeted him at every new exploit, the most trying and anxious work of his life began to seem a blessing especially bestowed upon him so that he might receive this reward. The gentle pressure of Violet's hand from time to time was better than the ringing congratulations of the whole Grimshorn board of directors, and her one little simple exclamation, "Oh, how *wonderful,* Robert!" he would not have exchanged for the rows of framed diplomas hanging in his office.

"I have no idea," he went on, "how much more time this affair may demand. The

London company seem to think my presence necessary."

"You don't mean," she asked, "that you must go to London yourself?"

"Yes," he answered, hardly daring to add that he must be in London by the 27th.

"Will you have to go soon?"

"Almost immediately."

She slipped both arms round one of his and held him fast, letting her head rest against his shoulder.

"Dearest," he said, "how can I go without you?"

"And how can I let you?" she looked up, smiling at him.

"But you wouldn't?" he questioned.

"We can be married," she said. Halifax's cup of joy was full to overflowing; but Violet, startled as she realized all that this sudden promise meant, drew away from the tall man beside her who to-day was her lover, and who yesterday had been a stranger to her in all but name, and for a few moments she sat looking down at her small white hands folded in her lap.

There was a difference between adding a *fiancé* to the home life which contented her and being taken by a husband far away from



the parents upon whom she had always depended. At last, turning, she said:

"I can't let you go without me." He sealed this promise with a kiss. "But before we make any more plans," she went on, when she could speak again, "I think I would better tell my father."

Robert agreed in the wisdom of this, feeling, moreover, confident of Mr. Bagsby's consent. "Was there ever a man so happy?" he thought, while he waited for Violet to return. Pacing about the room, he enumerated the rapid successes of his career. "Not thirty yet—a name I am not ashamed to offer the finest woman in the world, an opinion that must be worth something since they send five thousand miles for me to give it, money, a wife, a home," and, had Mr. Bagsby then entered, he might have found his future son-in-law smiling proudly to himself, as his thoughts danced away towards the hours of joy to be spent with Violet on the ship, in London, when he should have her all to himself, and in the years to come. "What a lucky thing Grimshorn takes me to London," he thought; "we shall have weeks with nobody to bother us."

Here the door opened, and Mr. Bagsby came in, extending his hand warmly to Rob-



ert and apologizing for his appearance: slippers, hair somewhat mussed, and a smoking-jacket.

"The truth is, I dropped off for a little nap while Mrs. B. was reading some reports to me. Violet seemed in such a hurry I didn't like to keep you waiting a moment," and Bagsby laughed in an indulgent way which implied his usual prompt obedience to Violet's requests. This encouraged Halifax.

"I have just been explaining to Violet that business necessitates my being in London on the 27th, two weeks from to-day. My reputation, in fact, depends upon it."

"Well, you do give us surprises," Bagsby commented, lifting his eyes without moving his head. "What's Violet say to this news?"

"She says that—that she will marry me and go with me to London." His pride and happiness were not to be concealed, but he asked, respectfully, "What do you think about it?"

Bagsby was intent on making the like fingers of his two hands meet and form a sort of slanting shed. He studied each jointure with as much attention as though the safety of a building depended upon it.

"There is something I wanted you should



speak to me about," he began, fitting his words with the same attention as his fingers. "Of course, your name and reputation are well known to us, Mr. Halifax, as I told you, and I have heard only expressions of approval concerning your business relations, but since last night I have been making some inquiries as to other matters. I guess you know what I have reference to. I hoped you might say something yourself that would clear things up, but you haven't, and I don't exactly feel as though, for the girl's sake, I ought to let the affair go further without asking an explanation."

The fingers, just as Bagsby got them fitted, slipped and made a basket-work of his hands, which he left as they were, evidently considering them too intricate to untangle.

"Don't you know what I mean, Mr. Halifax?"

Halifax understood that some one—every one—had gossiped about his intimacy with Mrs. Belford. He had taken his decision early in their friendship to bear what the world might say about them. It required all his memory and reason now not to regret it, as he said: "Yes, Mr. Bagsby; it would be dishonorable of me to say that I did not know what

you mean. I understand that the situation is, or has been, one you should question. I say, 'has been,' for I pledge my word of honor as a man and as a lawyer that there is no reason why you should not give me your daughter."

Bagsby disentangled his fingers and held out one hand to Halifax. "I have accepted you; I let Violet be engaged to you; you give me your word of honor; I value it; and I respect your reasons since you assure me they are sound: but there is one thing I ask—that you will never mention this to Violet, and that from now on you shall break off your friendship — intimacy — with Mrs. Belford, that you shall treat her as the merest acquaintance. I can't take any risks with the girl's happiness. Those are my conditions. Do you consent?"

In a flash the young man reviewed the scenes which this implied: the severing of old bonds, reproaches, abuse, accusations, and a certain justice withal, for his complete abandonment. Then, taking Bagsby's hand, and sweeping all but the present from his mind, he said:

"I consent."

"Your word of honor, Halifax?"

"My word of honor."



Violet's voice, laughing in the hall, as she entered with her mother, confirmed him in the wisdom of his decision; what else but the happiness which could prompt this merriment was now of any consequence?



Chapter V

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE

WHEN Halifax left the Bagsbys' doorstep he walked on air. Bagsby's kindness had infused him with the cheer of rare old Burgundy, and Violet's first expression of affection with the exhilaration of champagne. In a state of super-delirious intoxication he floated down the flight of stone steps, but when he reached the pavement he had in every sense of the term reached the earth. He gave a groan as he thought of Mrs. Belford, and any locomotion but that of the terrestrial pedestrian was a lost art. There were weights to his feet like balls. Poor Halifax dragged these unwilling members Victoriaward. He must "go to see her!" To perform the act he had hitherto needed no spur.

In the little drawing-room that he knew so well, Mrs. Belford did not keep him waiting long, but he had time to realize that the familiar knick-knacks and decorations hitherto



connected with Victoria were now lifeless objects, no longer even awakening a souvenir. At length, superbly dressed in dinner-toilet and wearing her most becoming jewels, she rustled in, approached her guest, and took both his hands rather than gave him hers.

"You are late. The Lawrence-Sands dined with us; have just gone. Lawrence-Sands is a treasure." This praise was for her guest's express benefit.

"They dined with you, did they? That was friendly. But where's Belford?"

Victoria laughed a little nervously. "My husband—how lovely of you to ask! Did you come to see *him?* Don't be ridiculous, Bobby. Sit down here. No?" for Robert refused his usual seat. "Well, where you like, and let me really look at you."

He returned her steady scrutiny and continued to appear undisturbed.

"I should be sorry to have you lose your air of distinction," she said, regretfully. "What is it? You've got a commercial dash about you. Speaking of commerce, how is the little pill?"

"I don't understand you, Victoria."

"Oh, don't add obtuseness to your new phase," she pleaded—"little Bagsby."



"He is very well, I believe. He has had the mumps, he tells me, but he is going to school to-morrow."

"*He!* my dear Robert—a disguise? I shouldn't have believed it. Little Bagsby a boy! Come, now—thin as a ramrod, awkward as a shad, I grant you, but really! Was it a wager?"

Robert rose. "Since you are determined to be unmistakable," he said, "if you mean Miss Violet Bagsby—"

Before he could say further his hostess, too, had risen and come swiftly to his side, much of her control gone.

"I do," she emphasized—"I *do* mean Violet Bagsby, and if you rise to reprove me in my own house, things must have gone very far. Hush! hush!"—he was about to speak—"don't go on; I won't hear it." She was white as her satin dress and highly excited. Halifax put his hand on her arm. "Sit down, Victoria, and be reasonable."

"*Reasonable?*" she panted.

"Yes. Is that a strange demand?"

"I know nothing of this—this girl." she waved with too evident pique; "her life is a matter of indifference to me. Do what you like—arrange your future as you must—only



never speak her name to me again. If you have planned this affair to make me *jealous*" —Mrs. Belford calmed herself, forcing a smile —"you have succeeded. I am fiendishly jealous. Please change the topic."

They were now seated on the sofa side by side. In the face of his dilemma, in the face of the attractive woman, Halifax did everything but regret Violet.

"I can't change the topic, I am sorry, and I can't agree not to mention Miss Bagsby. I've come to talk about her."

"You show bad taste."

He bowed. "I'm sorry you think so. I must for once be indifferent to your point of view."

"My dear Robert"—she put her hand on his knee and assumed a new tone—"I have never thought you impressionable; but millions are dazzling — extreme youth — charm. You have told me a tiresome number of times that a woman under thirty is insipid as new wine; but you see you are less of a connoisseur than you knew! Little Bagsby (if I must speak of her)"—Victoria flashed him a smile—"is pretty—really, very pretty indeed. Flirt with her, if you must," she sighed, "only don't tell me about it, and re-

member—" She shook a warning finger at him.

"Remember what?"

"That the little pill may have two coatings—sugar and gilt—but you don't know the ingredients. They may not agree with you, and may give you violent indigestion."

Robert was leaning forward, and not looking at Mrs. Belford. Her note jarred him and made him less like himself. "I'm not going to flirt with Miss Bagsby."

"I'm glad."

"I'm going to marry her."

There was a prolonged silence after Robert's bomb had fallen. He felt as though with the words he had dealt himself a blow on the head; his senses were dizzy.

To Mrs. Belford he had given a mortal wound, but her senses were under the best control.

"You are beautifully certain of your chance, my dear boy," she replied in a low tone. "You mean to say if she will consent."

"She has consented."

"Ah!"

"I am to be married next Saturday at midday."

Victoria did not burst into tears, or melodramatically start; she laughed instead with



a rich mirth that deceived her guest. Indeed, she was so merry that she was obliged to wipe her eyes. "Oh, Bobby, forgive me," she gasped. "It is delicious—too funny, really. I am conscious that I am taking your serious little affair badly. I am a poor confidante, but you must see that it has its humorous side."

"I would rather you should be amused than anything else." Halifax was chagrined and uncomfortable.

Here she extended her hand to him and calmed herself to a sweet gravity. "I hope you will be very happy."

Robert could not do otherwise than take the hand extended, but she would not let him quickly withdraw, and he saw no opportunity at this moment to say to Victoria anything that would make her suppose he was never going to see her again. He regretted his hasty promise to Mr. Bagsby, and blamed himself for a disloyal attitude to this old friend, but he would fulfil his promise to the letter, as a gentleman should. He would not wound unnecessarily, however.

"Thank you," he bowed over her hand.

Whatever she might have had in her mind to say, whatever appeal she might at the moment have made to Halifax, there was no

chance, for here the front door was opened with a latch-key.

"It is Mr. Belford." His wife rose as the host came in. She went up to his side.

"I have some news for you— No, no"— she waved Robert back—"please let me tell." She took her husband's arm; she had not voluntarily touched so much as his hand in fifteen years. He stared at her with shifting eyes.

"A piece of news?"

"Yes. Robert is going to be married. He is engaged to Miss Baggs."

Belford grinned and stared, first at Robert and then at his wife. "Baggs! Baggs! Very glad—don't know 'em, though."

"Bagsby," corrected Halifax—"Bagsby."

"Oh! still I don't know 'em."

"Of course you don't *know* them," comforted his wife, "but Robert does. Violet Bagsby—Camden G. Bagsby's daughter."

"Oh! the pill man," nodded the enlightened husband, and here he dared to press his wife's hand as it rested on his arm. Mrs. Belford withdrew as though she had been burned.

"The pill man's daughter," Belford smiled confidentially at his guest.

Halifax, extending his hand in good-night,



said: "Yes, I am to be married on Saturday at noon. I hope you will both come to my wedding."

When he had gone, Mrs. Belford rang to have the house locked and the lights put out; she turned from her husband as though he were a dummy which had been rolled in to receive the drapery of a garment. The garment removed, the figure stood dumbly where it had been placed. Belford, indeed, was so used to having his rôles designated that he was vacant and inert between promptings. Fingering his watch-chain, he remained just where Robert's exit had left him, gazing at the beautiful Victoria, who walked to the window, looked out, beat the crushed sofa-pillow into shape, moved some roses in a vase, picked her handkerchief up from the sofa, her brows drawn, her lips compressed. Suddenly she turned shortly to Amos Belford.

"For God's sake, what are you standing there for?" she demanded.

Poor Belford muttered some startled reply. The fact that she had lately put her hand even for so brief a second on his coat-sleeve her husband had not forgotten. He smiled at her, and took a step or two forward. Her reception was not deluding.



"You must be stranger than usual," she said, icily. "Will you please go up-stairs?"

"Victoria," he murmured.

"Go up-stairs!" She stamped her foot.

For a second he wavered as he stood, his uncertain hands and eyes pitifully pleading. Then he wheeled about and left the room.

Mrs. Belford remained immovable until his door closed and locked above stairs, and then she gave a cry in which her control utterly disappeared, and, throwing herself down full length on the divan, she buried her face in the cushions and wept and wept and wept.

When the first of her grief was exhausted she got up, and, going over to the mirror, tried to see herself in the shadowy glass. "I shall be a fright to-morrow—a hideous fright." She leaned on the mantel, her head sunk on her arms.

"Robert Halifax," she repeated, "I will never let you go."



Chapter VI

BAGSBY GIVES HIS DAUGHTER AWAY

DURING the few days before the wedding the Bagsbys' house was a general rendezvous for all the milliners and dressmakers in Chicago. Clouds of tissue paper floated about the air and house, and seemed in themselves to presage some important event. The bell rang so steadily that at last Mr. Bagsby organized a system whereby a footman stationed on the stoop could give a silent signal to a second man within, and the procession of tradesmen, heavy laden with gifts and purchases, could penetrate noiselessly the Bagsby mansion. Violet was in a flutter of excitement. She had written notes right and left, until her hand was exhausted. In response she had been surrounded by a bevy of friends and schoolmates, to whom she explained that the suddenness of her marriage would make bridesmaids an impossibility. She was trying on clothes of every description when Birdie

Atkinson, her former room-mate at boarding-school, rapped gently on the door with an apologetic air, as though Violet's engagement had placed her among a superior class entitled to great respect.

"Come in, Birdie!" Violet called. "I knew it was you. What a goose to rap! Look, isn't this a dream?" She spread out before Birdie's dazzled eyes a billowy mass of lace and flounces.

"It's too lovely! How many presents?"

"Seventy-nine. But of course lots more will come."

"What did the Zimmermanns send?"

"They haven't sent anything yet. Oh, Birdie, it is so exciting I wish you were going to be married, too."

Violet glided from one gown to another, and the group of women who were fitting on skirts, bodices, and sleeves swayed about, now on their knees, now on their tip-toes, their mouths full of pins, and their hair and costumes in a disorder which betokened an unprecedented rush. Birdie walked around the room looking at presents, cards, and fragments of trousseau.

"Why did you decide to be married in the house?" she asked.

"Oh, because both mother and father want-

ed it, and Robert and I are so happy we didn't care."

There was a strange sliding sound without in the hall, followed by a bang at the door.

"You can't come in, Grove," Violet called excitedly, starting forward and tearing down a flounce the poor dressmaker had just pinned up. "Birdie, lock the door! Don't let him in! I am too nervous."

"Just for a minute! I say, Vi, you're awful mean!"

"Do let your brother in," Mrs. Bagsby's gentle, motherly voice called.

"I can't. I am too nervous. Grove fusses with everything."

There was a little debate in the hall, and then a crashing sound, which, fading away, announced Grove's retreat.

"You will let your mother in, won't you?" Mrs. Bagsby's voice called.

"Of course," Violet answered, sweeping a place clear on the sofa for Mrs. Bagsby to sit down.

"Well, I couldn't get heart-shaped boxes for the cake," she began. "It 'll take two weeks to make them. How do you do, Birdie?"

"Let's see what you did get," said Violet,

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as her mother began fumbling helplessly in the large velvet bag harnessed to her side.

"Well, see if you can get this out of here, Birdie," she asked, and Birdie sprang to her assistance, feeling a certain importance at being called upon even for the smallest detail.

"Oh, those are lovely!"

"See what you think, Violet; they are to be marked in silver letters."

Violet expressed her satisfaction. "My, but it's hot in here!" Mrs. Bagsby exclaimed. "That looks nice, Miss Micks," she added to the dressmaker, in an encouraging, motherly tone. "Any news, Vi?" she asked, improvising a fan out of a piece of paper. "Grove says there have been seventy-two people here since lunch. It's just a whirl from morning to night." She addressed this last remark to Miss Micks, the dressmaker, feeling that she would be its most sympathetic audience.

"It's all arranged about the flowers and everything. They're coming Saturday morning to begin decorating. *My!* what a time I had making them understand how you wanted the room fixed up!"

At this moment there was a deferential rap at the door, which Birdie opened wide enough to take in a telegram. She handed it to Mrs.



Bagsby, who tore it open, fumbled for her eye-glasses, put them on over her veil, and read:

"Train arrives five-thirty. Will be at house at six. Delighted with news. CAROLINE."

"Oh, dear!" said Violet. "I didn't know that Aunt *Carrie* was coming. Who asked her?"

"It must have been your father; I haven't heard of it before."

"It's almost six now; she will be here in a few minutes. I really think she might have waited. I don't believe father asked her at all. She is always dropping down on us. You know she is."

"Remember," said Mrs. Bagsby, "that she is your father's sister. Birdie, just ring the bell twice, will you?"

A maid responded, a pert Irish maid, with a neat white cap and an apron ruffled over the shoulders.

"Mary," Mrs. Bagsby began, apologetically, "will you see that the red room is made ready for Miss Bagsby; she'll be here at six."

"The red room?" Mary asked, defiantly; "it's chock-full of wedding-presents. You'd better put her in the blue room, Mrs. Bagsby."



"Very well, just as you say," and Mary whisked away, and almost upset the newly arrived guest, who was hurrying towards Violet's room.

"My dear sister," she cried, throwing her arms around Mrs. Bagsby's neck. "How sudden! Violet, dear, dear child! Miss Atkinson, Miss Micks," she turned from one to the other, even shaking hands in her excitement with the little sewing-girl who was holding the scissors and tape-measure.

"This is a surprise."

No one contradicted her.

"Little Violet a bride!"

'Little Violet took advantage of her aunt's turning towards some finery which attracted her to signal that she did not want her to stay long.

"I was just in the midst of my Browning class when your telegram came, and I dropped everything. I said to them all: 'Ladies, this don't occur more than once in a lifetime, when you've got only one niece, and I can't leave them to do all the getting ready without me.' They all said I was right, so I packed up, and here I am. I'm real anxious to see Mr. Halifax." She spoke with a decided emphasis on every *r*, a sort of burring sound,



which, with her hard, nasal voice, made her conversation anything but pleasant. "The folks are all well up at Grand Rapids," she went on. Her clothes were exaggerated and in bad taste, and there was nothing about her appearance or manners which suggested the refinement to which Violet was accustomed. She was ashamed of her aunt.

"My!" she said, scrutinizing the skirt in process of construction. "Is *that* how you're making the skirts here now? Why, we wore 'em that way last fall up at Grand Rapids."

"Caroline," her sister-in-law said, rising at a second signal from Violet, "I guess your room is ready now, and you must be ready for it. We got your telegram so late, you see," she explained, as they disappeared together down the hall.

Presently Birdie rose. "It's dark now, and I must rush. Good-night; I'll be over in the morning to help you make out a list, and anything else you want. Good-night," and she departed, followed by Miss Micks and her battalion, leaving Violet alone with her own little French maid, who quietly, sympathetically busied herself about the room, doing exactly what her mistress would have sug-

gested had she not flung herself down on the sofa, too tired to speak.

And so the days went on, and the one who was to wed seemed to have been forgotten in the preparation for wedding. Robert had only fitful glimpses of his *fiancée* stolen from *modistes* and *lingères*, and when at last the morning of the wedding arrived he could hardly believe that, after this restless, disturbed courting, he was to have long, peaceful days of uninterrupted companionship with the woman whose every attribute he loved.

The sound of hammering ceased towards eleven o'clock on the final day; nails had been driven into awning and crash; the house was pervaded by a warm, heavy smell of flowers, which fairly intoxicated Violet as she made a farewell tour over the lower floor to see that all was ready. She had on a simple morning dress which she had worn at school; her hair was flying loosely about her face, and she loved to think of the great contrast this careless and informal visit of Miss Violet Bagsby, almost running through the rooms, would make with the stately magnificence of Mrs. Robert Halifax, who was soon to be standing at her husband's side under the stupendous marriage-bell. She suggested



several changes to the florists and caterers at work, and then went back to her domain, where trunks and bags and umbrellas, together with roses and silver, crystal, and a vision of tulle and white satin, combined to make the wonderful picture which is the frontispiece to the life of every married woman. Aunt Carrie was installed in a corner. Mrs. Bagsby stood, almost too stiff to move, in a purple brocaded velvet, with a high lace collar that would catch in her elaborately dressed back hair, a cobweb handkerchief of linen and embroidery plastered to her side, and, nodding over her portly figure, a diamond-sprinkled aigrette, in whose equilibrium the position of her head indicated she had no confidence; before the long mirror, Grove, in his velvet suit, was making faces of all sorts and gesticulating with his kid-gloved hands. Even the great happiness of the moment did not keep a lump from Violet's throat.

"Couldn't they leave her alone a few moments?" she wondered.

"How's my dress?" Mrs. Bagsby asked, getting tangled in the train, as she tried to show it off by turning slowly round.

"It's lovely, mother, and you look all right,

but can't Grove go out? I've only got three-quarters of an hour to dress."

"Grove, go find your father's secretary and stay with him till you are sent for. Do you hear?"

Violet kissed her mother, and whispered something to her.

"Come, Caroline, let's go down," Mrs. Bagsby said to her sister-in-law, who answered:

"I thought you might like me to put on your veil. I did Miss McElwyn's up at Grand Rapids — you know, Em, Vide McElwyn's daughter?—and they all said it was elegant."

"Thank you, Aunt Carrie; Madame Reilly is coming to arrange it for me," and her next thought was an incongruous prayer that Aunt Carrie's dress of pink taffetas, with bunches of chiffon and light-blue baby ribbon in profusion over the skirt and corsage, would not be seen.

She was nervous; she added a touch lightly here and there to adjust or complete a toilet which was being composed to perfection by deft hands. Her room, which the day before had been bedecked with dance cards, German favors, souvenirs of school escapades, and college commencements, was now denuded of all landmarks associated with what she con-



sidered foolish, girlish nonsense, but which she missed, nevertheless. The empty, blank spaces on the walls and over the mantel corresponded with a certain unknown blank in the future before her. She was excited and happy, with the sort of happiness that fairly dances before the eyes, and yet there was a tinge of melancholy as she repeated over, instinctively, "Now this is the last time Violet Bagsby shall stand before this mirror." It was a farewell, a final look upon girlhood, upon the youthful, irresponsible time when the parental love, with its enveloping light, makes the world seem shadowless. She contemplated herself as a bride, and could not but appreciate her own loveliness. The first notes of music reached her from below, and she realized that the moment had come in preparation for which the household and neighborhood and an army of employees had worked unremittingly for a week, the moment towards which she had looked and longed and dreamed all her girlhood.

Her father greeted her at the head of the stairs; he was calm; together with affection and admiration he showed a certain reverence for this lovely vision, pale and stately under its veil of tulle.

"Violet," he said, gently.

"Father," she answered, taking his arm with a slight pressure that expressed to him all her voice refused to utter.

"They're waiting," he added. "Robert's there, little girl; everything's ready," and together they descended.

Bagsby thought only of the daughter by his side, who was to pass that hour from his control into the keeping of another; of that husband whose advent he had both hoped for and dreaded. He walked with his head erect, a look of pride for his child on his fine old face, and an expression of confidence and faith in his eyes which would have claimed from all whom they encountered the best they had to give.

In Violet's mind no one thought rose above the ecstatic confusion, the kaleidoscope of faces, dresses, presents, musicians, flowers, marriage-bells, ministers in white surplices, parents, brothers, aunts, ushers, a tall, handsome, triumphant groom, and a pale, trembling, happy, exquisite bride.

When the ceremony was over, even before Halifax could speak to his wife, some woman had taken her hand and was repeating famil-



"'ROBERT HAS MANY FRIENDS, AND THEY ALL CALL HIM THEIR DEAREST'"



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iar congratulations, while her eyes searched eagerly the details of the bride's gown and veil. And this guest was followed by a procession which included tall, short, fat, and thin, distinguished and vulgar men and women, who all said the same thing, in different ways, and with different inflections. At last, when there was a lull, and a preliminary move towards the dining-room announced that the wedding-breakfast was about to be served, Mrs. Amos Belford made her way over to Violet, with a critical look, as though she questioned her identity; she let her lorgnette fall and took Violet's hand, saying as she did so:

"I am so glad to meet you! Robert, you know, is one of my oldest and dearest friends. You must let me wish you worlds of happiness; and you, too, my dear fellow," turning to Robert, while Violet responded:

"You are very kind. Robert has many friends, and they all call him their dearest!"

Mr. Bagsby came up with a request that the bride and groom should take the lead in seating their guests at table.

"Your mother seems to think it's time, so I guess you better go in."

Halifax began to wonder if married life was going to be for him like his courtship, a



confusion of interfering people with whom he was obliged to share his wife.

Mrs. Bagsby was evidently much flustered, but in Bagsby's manner there was calm dignity. He had left "all fixing up" to the others, contenting himself with a frock-coat he had worn for several years, and a comfortable pair of boots which could not surprise him in any way. "It's not that I think anything's good enough for the girl's wedding-day," he had exclaimed to Mrs. B.; "nothing is, but I'm not myself when I'm dressed up, and there are some things I want to remember about this affair besides my clothes. At that last evening reception we went to, I was just standing first on one foot and then on the other the whole evening. I felt pretty much like a fool, too; so I guess if you and Vi don't mind I'll wear my old togs this time."

In consequence, he was himself, his own big-hearted, generous, best self, and Robert was pleased with the courtesy and hospitality his father-in-law offered, free from any suggestion of the ridiculous which Mrs. Bagsby, left alone to do the honors, might have presented to the minds of Chicago gossips.

The minister who had married the young people was called upon for a benediction when



every one was seated in a labyrinth of orchids and maiden-hair, shining silver, glass, and bewildering, snowy mountains of wedding-cake.

He spoke a few words which nobody heard, and then his assistants were asked for further blessings, and at last the breakfast was served, and the general hum and murmur of conversation and laughter denoted that others besides the bride and groom were having a merry time.

During breakfast several telegrams were handed to Robert and Violet, addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Halifax, which made the bride blush and brought a look of undisguised pride into her husband's eyes.

That same evening Mr. and Mrs. Bagsby, after pretending to dine, sat alone in the room which seemed like the vast vacant halls built to awaken echoes. Grove had been sent to bed, worn out with too much festivity and wedding-cake. Mrs. Bagsby was luxuriating in an old dress and her own hair, which Bagsby said was "good enough for him any day." Aunt Caroline had disappeared with a sick headache, and Bagsby had made himself comfortable in slippers and a smoking-jacket.

"They're just about starting now," he said,

pulling his watch out and comparing it with the clock over the mantel.

"I guess we better keep that French girl. Violet was so fond of her. Eh?" his wife asked; both speaking what was uppermost in their minds.

"Eugénie—why, certainly."

"It seems," she continued, "that Violet's friends all helped her to dress for going away, and Eugénie couldn't do a thing. She was crying about it, and said they didn't know how to fix her up at all."

"The trunks got off, didn't they?"

"My, yes. Didn't you see 'em driving away, with a big white satin bow tied to each handle?"

"Violet has plenty of money for the present," he went on, consulting a little note-book he pulled from his pocket. "Halifax wouldn't let me settle anything upon her. He said when he proposed he had no idea she was a girl of means, and he didn't intend it should be said he married her for that reason. He is a fine fellow— How red your eyes are, Em! It is a pretty big wrench for us both. But they won't be gone long; three months pass fast enough. Come, Emmie, dear, don't give way like that."



This final request was sufficient to loosen fresh floods, and between sobs Mrs. Bagsby endeavored, with choking and sudden, unexpected soprano tones, to explain her sorrow:

"I had such a queer feeling when I said good-bye to my child. She's often been off to school, but that was—different somehow. I had a kind of presentiment this time. Oh, oh!—"

Bagsby patted her round, motherly back in the effort to soothe her. "The next wedding," he said, "in this house will be our silver wedding, November 17th; twenty-five years ago—it seems like yesterday. Let's see. I saw you first"—the sobbing diminished—"I saw you first at the Spooneyville county fair. My, but you were pretty that day"—the sobbing ceased—"you had on a blue dress, with ruffles."

Mrs. Bagsby lifted the handkerchief from her eyes. "You know better than that," she said; "it never saw a drop of blue dye; it was a Nile green, and I stitched every one of those ruffles myself."

On the strength of this preliminary success, Bagsby continued: "You were wearing a brown hat with some feathers in it, and you had a blue parasol!"

This time Mrs. Bagsby laughed. "I guess to-day's excitement's been too much for your memory. I never wore brown as a girl. It wasn't becoming."

"Then it couldn't have been brown, for it was becoming. You were such a picture I tried my first poetry and my last that night. I couldn't think of anything to rhyme with 'Emeline' except 'Will you be mine?' and I didn't dare write that. I wasn't as plucky as Halifax"—Bagsby laughed—"but I won my girl. It was one night out in the arbor that I got up my courage to speak." Mrs. Bagsby listened with a pleased and flattered smile on her tear-stained face, while Bagsby turned the light of memory back over the long-ago days, as the sun sends its rays towards evening to envelop in a mellow haze that part of the world over which it has travelled at full noon.

"Yes, it was out in the arbor; there was a moon, but the shadows were misleading, and I asked you to take my arm. As we walked back and forth, your hand seemed to get kind of heavy, as though you were glad to lean a little on me, and it all sort of came to me. I thought I'd like to have you always leaning and depending on me, and so I asked you,



and you said 'Yes,' and I guess we've neither of us ever regretted it."

"I guess not." Mrs. Bagsby smiled into the lace jabot which billowed over her matronly breast.

"I've got just one thing to ask, and that is," said Bagsby, taking his wife's hand, "that Violet and her husband shall be as happy for twenty-five years and more to come as Mrs. and Mr. Camden G. Bagsby."



Chapter VII

THE LIMITED

PATTERFIELD was an anarchist — not against a monetary system, but an amorous discontent revolting against the successful happiness of love. Wealth, enormous wealth, gained and enjoyed over his head, riches seized upon, leaving him pauper, this was too much to endure and bless. He was sallow with unhappiness, furious against Halifax, and so jealous of Violet that he really felt he could, without compunction, toss a bomb into this palace of golden love.

He wore a mask, of course, over eyes to his nose, so that the world at least could only guess at the identity of his passion.

The wedding—a dreadful doomsday that he had believed something would avert—was now of the past. Violet white and beautiful, Halifax triumphant, and little Grove—he couldn't even forget his splendor of black velvet and shining, smooth, carroty head! But



clearest to him, besides the two important figures, was the magnificent Mrs. Belford. West carefully adjusted his mask, tying it on tight; thus he felt he could look boldly through the eyelets at the world. He had been interested to know if Victoria would go to the wedding, and when he saw that she was present he curiously regarded her. This woman, too, had put on a mask with great care; but her nervous fingers, less sure than the man's, must have slipped a string, for at one point in the service the frail protection of conventionality fell, and West saw for a second a suffering like to his own.

Mrs. Belford had turned full about and looked at him.

"I must meet her," he thought.

"I must meet him," she thought.

And, strangely enough, they did not meet at all. West, too, was going abroad. It was a plan many months old, and he had long since taken his cabin on the *Alva*. The curious fact that he was to be in London with the bride and groom almost amused him; he didn't regret it, and in his pique he was inconsistent. An enemy to their flag of new happiness, he wanted it unfurled, nevertheless, before his eyes! He hoped devoutly

that he would not collide with them on the train; it was unlikely. The newly wedded pair should have gone decidedly at eight o'clock. He placed his valise, overcoat, and umbrella, to mark his section, and went into the smoker, strolled out again, and saw, sitting behind a *Harper's Magazine*, Mrs. Amos Belford.

"The derelicts of the wedding-party," he thought, with facetious bitterness. "I wonder if we will do any damage to the new boats?"

He sat down and studied at his leisure the handsomest woman in Illinois. Her toilet was conspicuous; she was dressed less suitably for travelling than for a morning's round in her own carriage. She was pale, and West saw, now that he was only a few feet away from her, that the marks around her eyes and mouth clearly showed she had sent the early thirties to join the twenties in her past. He wished very much he knew her as well as he did her reputation. Here he stopped himself —just what did he know of her reputation? That Robert Halifax had been a constant visitor at her house for years; that they were inseparable companions, and the attendant scandals to this fact; that Belford himself



was a New York broker who had lost his constitution and kept his fortune; that he drank heavily, belonged to no clubs, kept himself to himself; they said that he was a willing dupe. Mrs. Belford went everywhere, and set the North Side fashions in dress.

"It is perfectly extraordinary that she should be on the train," he thought. "Quite as queer as that I should! I wish to Heaven I knew why she's here!"

He left the car, passing through to the next. As he strolled back again he looked directly at Mrs. Belford, who returned the glance. She shut her magazine and leaned forward.

"Mr. West." West lifted his hat and came quickly towards her.

"Mrs. Belford," he said, easily.

"Yes. I begged Mrs. Crawford-Crawford to present us yesterday, but you were so elusive you couldn't be found at the right moment. We will take her will for the deed."

"I am delighted to do so," said West, and seated himself opposite to her.

"After living in the same city for several years, it's odd to meet under the spell of other people's happiness. We were together at 'the proposal,' at 'the wedding,' and here we are on the 'bridal train.'"



West started violently. "On the bridal train? Oh no, no! You don't mean it?"

She nodded. "I do, indeed. It seems as if we were part of these people's horoscope in a singular way."

West grinned. "Like Fate unseen."

"Oh," disclaimed Victoria, sweetly, "like Fortune in the form of faithful friends."

"Hm!"

"What a lovely wedding it was! Wasn't it? And what a lovely bride!"

"Miss Bagsby's awfully pretty."

"Miss Bagsby?" laughed Mrs. Belford.

West crimsoned an ugly red. "Mrs. Robert Halifax," he slowly corrected into Mrs. Belford's eyes. The lady didn't flush; she grew paler than ever.

"Oh, I congratulated her," she quickly said. "'Mrs. Robert Halifax, you must let me wish you worlds of happiness as one of Robert's oldest and dearest friends.'" She was talking less to West than to herself. "I hear myself now. And really the little thing answered very prettily indeed: 'Robert has many friends, and they all seem to call him their dearest.' I don't know how naïve she is, or how clever."

"She is very, very clever."

Mrs. Belford looked as though she must be-



lieve it if Mr. West said so, and shrugged her shoulders. "What an original wedding!"

"Original?"

"With such characters as the father and mother Bagsby, and the little red-headed boy —delicious!"

West felt uncomfortable for his old friends. "It's more than original," he said, sulkily; "it's sheer madness, nothing less."

"'Married in haste,'" quoted Victoria.

"Why, they are perfect strangers," West said.

"Perfect," she agreed.

West looked down at his gloves; he unfastened and rebuttoned them.

"You know Miss Bagsby well?" asked his companion.

"I know her very well, indeed. I was," he said, quietly, "engaged to marry her."

Mrs. Belford started, aroused marvellously from her pale lassitude. "What!" she whispered, bending towards West closely. "What?"

"I was engaged to her," he repeated, not knowing whether he was glad or sorry to have told.

"My heavens!" Victoria clapped her hands. "How long ago, pray?"



"So long ago as the day of Mrs. Crawford-Crawford's musicale."

His companion laughed hysterically. "Good heavens! Off with the old love like that!" She snapped her fingers. "In an hour—in half an hour—engaged to you—meets Robert—pif!"

Patterfield nodded.

"Poor Robert! poor Robert!" she ejaculated.

Her *vis-à-vis* started. "Poor Halifax?"

"Of course," she said. "If she can so lightly throw over one, why not two?"

"True," agreed West; but he cheerfully said, "Poor Violet rather, and perhaps—"

"Ah! Why?"

The young man made a bold and unusual dare. "Let the rule work both ways. If Halifax can turn from a beautiful woman in an hour, for a new face, who, then, at a tomorrow's musicale, may not turn him from Violet?"

The woman before him blushed like a girl. "You and I are the only ones in the quartette —for you have made it a quartette, Mr. West—you and I are the only ones not to be pitied, then." She held out her hand frankly, which he took and gently pressed. "I don't like pity,



I confess," said the lady, "and in the rôles of Fate or Fortune we ought to protect these poor things."

West looked interested.

"Perhaps we can at least prevent their fancies from straying outside of this four-cornered square."

He smiled intelligently.

"Your engagement was not announced?"

"No, no, and I have broken faith in telling you. My principles are all upset. I feel I am a criminal at heart. I'd do anything to get even with him. Isn't it awful?"

"Natural," comforted the other, and then she cleverly turned the conversation and informed him that she was going on to New York to meet her husband, who was taken suddenly ill at the Astoria. She made herself so agreeable that West, for the space of two hours and a half, forgot his unhappiness, and what could a woman ask more?

At the end of the last car Halifax and his bride were sitting in the observatory enclosure, looking at the flying scene. Halifax had secured what privacy was possible; they had been *en route* for three hours, and during this time had discussed the details of the wedding; laughed at what mischances there had



been, criticised the guests, made out a list of people to whom they were to write letters of thanks, designated the presents they were glad to receive and those that were "too hideous to keep," and decided for what they would like to exchange them. Robert found more and more that he must woo where he had so swiftly won. He found in this young girl the realization of many dreams. After the woman he had known longest and best, to whom he was so accustomed, Violet was a revelation. Frank and sincere, she had no arts wherewith to charm, and needed none.

"Robert," she said, looking up from the little designs she had absently drawn on her note-book after the last memorandum she had written ("Thank Mrs. Crawford-Crawford for a perfectly beautiful punch-bowl, which we are going to keep")—"Robert, who was the woman who came up and congratulated us, and said you were 'one of her dearest friends'?"

"Oh—Mrs. Belford, you mean—Mrs. Amos Belford."

"Was that she?" mused the girl. "She is awfully handsome, isn't she?"

"She is considered very handsome."

"Oh, she is, decidedly—and what a dress! The *Times-Herald* says she is the best-dressed



woman in Chicago. I have read her name very often."

"Dearest," interrupted her husband, "don't let us forget my uncle Robert's diamond sunburst. We can exchange that at Tiffany's to-morrow. We'll have time to run in before we sail."

"Is she one of your dearest friends?"

"Who?" questioned the wily Robert.

"Mrs. Belford."

"Victoria!" he unluckily slipped.

"Victoria! You call her that?"

Before Halifax could sink further in his own estimation, or deceive his wife, or lie to his father-in-law, he was obliged to rise—red, startled—to greet Mrs. Amos Belford. She was alone.

"How wise to choose the observation-car!" she greeted the bride and groom. "And how you have corrupted the porter, Bobby! I don't know what it cost me to get in here! When we stopped at the time of that dreadful jar a few minutes ago," she explained directly to the bride, "they had to take off the car I was in. It was a case of hot box, or cold storage, or something annoying," she smiled. "There wasn't a seat in any car for me, so I had to be indiscreet"—she touched Violet's hand light-



ly with her own—"and throw myself on your mercy for twenty miles or so."

Robert, in his whirl of surprise, believed Victoria capable of having caused the hot box herself for this *coup*.

"Don't apologize for speaking to us," said Mrs. Halifax, gracefully. "We are delighted."

"Is it a case of 'even an enemy,'" asked Victoria, "already?"

"Not yet," shook Mrs. Halifax's pretty head. "But it is a case of 'always a friend.'"

"She is clever," thought Victoria, "very. Mr. West is right."

Robert was speechless. He rose to give this woman his chair, which, as Violet did not sit down, Mrs. Belford refused. "The little wretch is going to freeze me out standing!" thought the older woman.

Poor Robert, harassed by his promise to his father-in-law that he would not speak of Victoria to Violet, in a fury at his interrupted *tête-à-tête* with his wife, and wondering at Victoria, appeared at his worst. He was so little at ease that his wife couldn't help but observe it. Mrs. Belford "Bobbied" him, and chatted about the wedding, the gifts, until Robert assumed a smile which was an unmistakable cross between rage and familiar-



ity. At the crisis Violet was superb. Several people had entered the car in search of seats because of the accident, and the bride turned almost abruptly in the midst of an answer to Mrs. Belford.

"Oh, excuse me," she said, "there is some one with whom I wish to speak. Don't go, Mrs. Belford, please; I will be back in a moment." And she sailed serenely down the aisle towards a benign old lady in a purple bonnet at the far end of the car.

"Well!" muttered Halifax, glaring at Mrs. Belford, "you are extraordinary." He made as though he would follow his wife.

"Where are you going?" asked his companion.

"Why, do you think I intend to stay here with you and let her go wandering around in the car alone? Do you realize what a scandal you are suggesting by your behavior?"

"Scandal? Nonsense! Wait!" commanded Mrs. Belford. "Do you want to have your wife think that there is any reason why you should not speak with me for a few moments? If that purple-hatted old lady had taken it into her head to greet you, would you have rushed off like a madman and left her alone?"

Robert showed no signs of being convinced.

"Don't you see," said the clever woman, "the charming expression of trust that your wife has just displayed? I congratulate her. She is a diplomatist. But there can't be any scandal after this. She has given it the lie and cut out the foolish tongues." Mrs. Belford appeared to be sincerely admiring. "It was perfectly lovely. Don't be a fool and spoil it."

"You have thrown convention to the winds, haven't you?" he broke in. "You want to ruin my reputation with my wife. God knows what you want."

"Bobby!"

"Don't call me that!" he furiously forbade.

"Robert!"

"You must be mad. I can't call you indelicate. Why, that word would smash itself into slivers with the strain on it," he cried. "You are insane!"

"Robert!" she said again, and her voice, which Halifax knew so well, was trembling with emotion. Her eyes were dark with tears. He couldn't fail to see how she had thinned and paled, and it made him further angry to find that he was pained at her suffering.

"What, in God's name, are you doing?" he



demanded; "and what are you on this train for?"

"Cruel! cruel!" she breathed.

"Victoria," he said, "do you want to ruin my life's happiness?"

"Your happiness!" she murmured. "My God! And what of me?"

This he put aside. "How can you so forget yourself as to follow me to New York?"

"Follow you!" she repeated, scornfully. "Follow you! You must, indeed, think I am insane. Do you suppose, if there had been another mode of covering the distance, I would not have taken it? I had to go to New York, Robert," she said again, in a tense undertone. Here she leaned towards him, whispered something under her very breath, although in the retirement of the observatory no one could have heard. At what she said, Halifax exclaimed. Mrs. Belford drew the edge of her kid glove back and turned up the cuff of her dress. Here the tears poured out of her eyes over her cheeks. Halifax again exclaimed, and with an old familiar gesture he touched her hand lightly.

"Poor girl!" he said, "poor girl!"

She thanked him with her eyes and lips, and, still leaning towards him, talked and talked.

They had resumed the chairs occupied by the bride and groom a moment since, and the husband listened too long. Rising at last, he said:

"Why didn't Violet come back, I wonder?"

"She said she would be back directly, didn't she?"

As the two came out of the little observatory they saw that the extra car must have been put on, for all the other travellers had disappeared—all but two people, a man seated in the corner of the little sofa and bending forward, eagerly talking to his companion, whose rolling-chair had its back to Halifax.

"Why, that's West, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Victoria, surprised, "so it is."

And the person to whom West was talking so delightedly was Mrs. Halifax. She was giving to whatever he was saying close attention. The two looked up at the other two who drew near.

"I am afraid I shall have to rob you, Mr. West," said Halifax, "of the most delightful audience in the world."

"Oh, of course—of course," said West, who rose. "But you'll be awfully dull dining alone, you two. Since we have the strange

chance of finding ourselves together, shall we dine *à quatre?*"

"Perfectly delightful," acquiesced the bride.

And Victoria was also enchanted.

There was nothing for Halifax to do but to agree with as good grace as he might. He took, therefore, the first meal of his married life in a Pullman dining-car, his wife and Patterfield West opposite him, and Victoria Belford by his side.

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Chapter VIII

AN ATTEMPTED DEPARTURE

THE New York end of the wedding-party's arrangements had been successfully taken care of by Halifax's best man. On the arrival of the Limited, the bride and groom were to drive from the Grand Central Railway in an automobile to the Astoria; and when Halifax finally turned his back on the station that still sheltered West and Mrs. Belford, he hoped that the "merriment" so often spoken of in connection with the "marriage-bell" was about to commence. Every time he looked at West he was at heart a murderer. This was the "P. W." of mystery, a man who had frankly addressed amorous words to his wife, and between whom and his wife, as she had distinctly admitted, there was something unexplained.

"I think," he remarked to Violet, and was furious at himself for the utterance of every word, "that West's taking the Limited was the coolest thing I have ever seen!"



"Except Mrs. Belford's trip," returned the bride.

"Mrs. Belford was called to New York by her husband's illness; it would have been inhuman for her to have considered us."

"And Mr. West is going to England on business for his firm," explained Violet, "and couldn't—"

But her husband broke in on her abruptly. "West going to England?"

They were swaying down Fifth Avenue in their bulky bridal car, the great caravansary towards which they were bound in near sight. Violet, looking on either side at the New York styles—at what she could see of them as they passed her in carriages and on foot—ignored for the moment this exclamation. Then, "Why, yes! Why shouldn't he? He sails on the *Alva*."

Robert made a noble determination. He had been the husband of this girl twenty-four hours, and, whatever their future might be, he was not going to blight the beginning by a display of hideous jealousy. Therefore, as they turned through Thirty-fourth Street and into the court entrance of the Waldorf, he whispered to her a word of affection and looked at

her with a smile which he tried to infuse with perfect confidence.

"Here we are, darling," and, before the porter could offer his aid, Robert had helped out Mrs. Halifax and was rewarded for his controlled temper by a look that sent him to the seventh heaven of bliss. Thus they entered their hostelry.

Violet had scarcely drawn off her gloves in the private parlor of their suite when a card was brought to her husband.

"I shall have to go down at once to see this man," he said, regretfully.

"Who is he?"

"My broker. He may keep me an hour. I'm awfully sorry. What will you do?"

"Write to mother and father and read these telegrams." There was a pile of them on the table.

Halifax took her in his arms and held her closely and tenderly, murmuring a very little of his great happiness. "Good-bye, dearest. I will get rid of him as soon as I can."

He had not been gone half an hour before a florist's box was brought to the Halifaxes' apartment, containing several dozens of Violet's favorite roses. She lifted them from their tissue-paper with much sentiment, thank-



ing Robert for every rose, touching her cheeks and even her lips to them. Ringing for a vase, she filled it with the flowers, stood back to admire the profusion, and pinned one rose on her dress. She read her messages and telegrams, and prepared to write home; and sat long before her paper, her pen motionless after the words, "Dearest mother and father." Instead of the details of her trip and a few gay things New York suggested, she longed to write as follows: "Mrs. Belford came with us on the train. What a strange and beautiful woman! She frightens me, although I try not to show it. She is so clever, she is so handsome, and she adores my husband—she adores my husband!"

These thoughts filling her mind, the little bride slowly wrote things very different. The result was a stiff, four-sheet letter in which she did not mention the travelling companions; towards the end, however, her love overflowed to that dear father and mother — her pen went more quickly. As she signed herself, "Your loving daughter, Violet Halifax," a big tear fell right on her married name. "Dear me!" she murmured.

Down-stairs Halifax sat in a window-seat of the Moorish Room, talking absorbedly to the

senior partner of his banking and broking firm. "As you know," he said, "I have married the daughter of a multi-millionaire, and I have asked the privilege of supporting my wife without any help from my father-in-law. I am anxious to do this as well as possible, and that she shall miss no luxury. I am carrying a great deal of stock," continued the client. "I question whether I wouldn't better unload before going to Europe."

"You'll unload at a loss," said the broker, "and it is the turn of the market."

"So I feel," said the Westerner, "and from Grimshorn I expect quadruple returns. The stock is at par; it ought to have a rise of ten within the next two weeks. It will undoubtedly fluctuate around par for a time."

The broker listened to him, interested in what he considered to be a very valuable tip from a man who knew.

"I know all about it," nodded Halifax, as though to further confirm. "I have seen the plants, and I know the principals. Use my information for what it is worth to you. There is a bonanza in this."

"I feel very much as you do," returned Mr. Whyte, "but I hesitate to advise, especially as your holdings in other lines are heavy."



Halifax smiled condescendingly. "This is as big a chance as the Blank Telephone was, and I am not at all inclined to get out."

At the end of the conversation he had decided to leave things for the present as they were; to do anything else would mean signal loss; one week was as good as another, and the fact of his being at sea was not likely to cause a panic in the market. If he had not regarded his mission to London in the light of a small fortune of fame and money, he would have been inclined to stay and watch the basket in which all of his eggs were put.

When he re-entered his parlor he found his wife in a bower of roses. The one in her dress caught his longest glance. She was thanking him in the sweetest way of all.

"I am sorry I did not send them," he protested. "I should have done so, but I didn't—I didn't think of it. There was no card, then?"

"No. I was certain they were from you."

"And since they were not—" Halifax put his hand on the rose Violet wore, as though to unpin it, but the girl was disappointed, and it made her capricious. "No, no," she said. drawing back; "it is an anonymous gift, and I put this on, thinking it was from you. I shall wear it."

Her husband frowned. "As you please," he said, indifferently. "Where is the box?"

It stood its long length upright in the corner. He opened it, and with Violet looked it through for a card, to be rewarded by the bit of pasteboard falling out at length in his hand—"Patterfield West."

Halifax, who found it, put it down deliberately on the table, feeling an anger rising within him hot and furious, an anger such as he had not deemed himself capable of experiencing. He could not speak—he didn't dare to.

Violet quietly unpinned the rose from her dress and laid it down by the card. She was excited and tired; she wanted at the moment to cry more than anything else. "Robert, this despatch says that mother has the influenza." It was from the sublime to the ridiculous. It broke the spell. "Do you suppose it is serious?"

"Oh, I don't believe so, dear. I will telephone at once and see, and ask them to wire us the last thing before we sail. I saw the head-waiter down-stairs and made out a fine little *menu*—a combination of our tastes."

And when the man came up to take the tel-

ephone message, Halifax ordered their dinner served in their parlor.

"What ship does West take?" asked Halifax.

"The *Alva*, I think," said the bride, indifferently.

Then Violet, her pretty blond head thrown back on the cushions of the most nearly comfortable chair, lifted to her husband a face so full of affection and sweetness that its expression, without her words, would have exorcised the jealous devil.

"Mr. West is an old friend," she gently said. "He is kind, but he isn't always tactful. Shall I ring for the chambermaid and present her with the flowers?" And Halifax, repentant, knelt by the chair, and, with her hand in his, assured her that this was unnecessary.

For just so long as Halifax could forget there had been any one else in his wife's past, just so long he was gloriously happy. "You could never break a promise, could you?" he asked her once.

"Yes," she nodded, "to make a better one."

But even this did not make him feel justified in failing to keep his word of honor to her father. He could not discuss Victoria with his wife for the sake of his wife and for the sake

of Mrs. Belford. "Confidence for confidence," he thought. "If I could only make a clean breast of Victoria she would tell me about West." He decided, however, to say nothing, to demand nothing. She had probably heard no rumors—she was not likely to hear them. If she had questioned his reputation she would have spoken to him long ago, or, further still, she would not have married him. The sleeping dogs lay, therefore, and he contrived to forget, and during that evening succeeded absolutely, and the little drawing-room at the Waldorf made and held for him the happiest memories of his life. During the evening he told his wife of his business affairs, and to the dry details she listened with pretty interest—and understood nothing at all.

"Oh, I know you will be rich if you want to," she assured. "Fortune appears to deny you nothing."

"It has dangerously spoiled me," he confessed, "and I tremble to think how full my strong-box is. I don't want a gold piece to slip over the rim—surely not to roll away. I am a miser."

They decided to leave the hotel at a very early hour the following morning, so that they might, *en route* for the steamer, do several



errands which Violet had left for New York; first of all they were to stop at Tiffany's and exchange Uncle Robert's sunburst of diamonds. Halifax said that Violet had enough sunbursts to wreck the solar system.

As she took the little parcel from the clerk at Tiffany's, after her exchange had been made, she gave a start of anxiety and seized her husband by the arm, exclaiming:

"Oh, Robert—my jewel-case!"

Robert knew enough of women to peacefully wait until this loss was certain. He had had heart spasms and nervous shocks from lost pocket-books and valuables before, only to see them finally turn up in the hand or out from the pocket of the owner.

"Well, dear," he asked, "are you sure?"

"I am quite, quite certain. I have left it at the hotel," said his wife, in great distress.

"We'll telephone."

"Oh, no!" she objected, "we couldn't telephone the key."

"But you don't want them to open it."

"No, but I want them to open the wardrobe. I hid it in the lower drawer," and she produced a key from her purse.

"Well, we will go back," said Halifax. "We've plenty of time."

"And then I won't be able to get my things at Fern's, or buy my steamer hat at Box's, and I haven't a thing to wear on the steamer, Robert!" She was in feminine and genuine perplexity.

They were now on the sidewalk, and the man held their cab door open for them. "I can do it all alone," urged the capable little Westerner. "Just think how often I have taken Grove around New York and shopped for Aunt Caroline. I'll drive right to Box's, then to Fern's, then to the ship. I saw Birdie Atkinson off on the *St. Louis.* I know just where it is, and you'll tell the man."

Indeed, she insisted so warmly that her husband was frankly surprised. "I prefer to telephone," he protested again, "and let them break the drawer in."

"Robert," she said, with agitation, "father would never, never forgive me if I lost those jewels. They are worth thousands and thousands of dollars. My pearls," she quavered, "and mother's wedding-gift from my father —she let me wear it—" There was a decided break in her voice.

"Oh, I'll go, I'll go," agreed poor Halifax. "Here," to the man, "call me a hansom, will you? Get in, dearest, and take care



"'OH, ROBERT—MY JEWEL CASE!'"



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of yourself, and don't go to Europe without me."

Violet laughed at the possibility, and Halifax gave the cabby minute directions, shut his pretty wife in, and sank into his own hansom, that dashed back to the Astoria as fast as a good horse and a driver made more than willing could take him.

In spite of the fact that common-sense told Robert he had time, he tore through the halls, shaking off a couple of men who hallooed to him and asked the reason of his reappearance, pausing, however, to explain the mystery to the hotel clerk, who gave him the keys of his suite.

More eager to get out than careful where he got to, he hurried from the elevator at the floor below his former suite, found the number 34 instead of 134; just there he met Patterfield West, who looked at him in unfeigned surprise.

"Why, I thought you were sailing!"

"I am," he said; "that is, I am going to."

"Well, so am I," said Patterfield West, and hurried by him.

"I shall see you in London," called Halifax.

"Oh, you'll see me before," returned West.

The door before Halifax was not even locked,

but slightly ajar. He pushed it open and entered; the room was quiet and darkened; he saw at once it was occupied by several people, and before he could slip away his arm was firmly seized.

"Robert!" said Mrs. Belford. "I knew you would come."

She was weeping, and pointed with a trembling hand to the door which opened into the next room. On its threshold between the bedroom and the parlor in which they were standing were two trained nurses and a doctor. "Mr. Belford is very ill," she said, "terribly ill." She was almost leaning on Halifax, pale, agitated, and she clung so tightly to his arm that he found himself wondering how he could get away without actually hurting her.

"I am awfully sorry," he murmured, and tried gently to disengage himself, "but I can't stay a moment."

She dropped his arm almost too hastily, and turned her pale face and accusing eyes on him. "What did you come for, then?"

"Why, I came back from my way to the steamer to get my wife's jewels," he hurried, "which she left in her room, and I shall barely have time to make my boat now."



"And Mr. West did not give you my message?"

"No," he said, still more shocked, for Mr. West must now have known where he was going when he entered Mrs. Belford's apartment. "No."

"But you came in here."

"By mistake. The numbers must be alike."

Here the doctor approached Mrs. Belford. "It is only the question of a few hours at the most," he said. "I can do nothing—nothing at all, and there is a very sick man for whom I can do something, to whom I must go at once. I will come back. The nurses know what to do, and Mr. Belford will probably not regain consciousness."

The woman to whom the doctor told these facts received them without a change of countenance. Halifax stood irresolute, and Victoria left his side and went into the next room, followed by the nurses. Here was his chance to go. He scorned it. The clock on the mantel struck nine-thirty.

"I have more than half an hour," he thought. "It can't take me twenty minutes to drive to the docks." He consulted his watch—it coincided with the stroke.

Mrs. Belford came slowly back to him. She



had calmed herself, and was more appealing and lovely in her serious mood than Halifax had ever known her.

"You are here still?" she said.

"Yes," and he took her hands kindly. "I don't know what to say. I am so sorry to leave you alone."

She smiled. "I have two strange women with me," she said, with an emphasis on the "strange."

"Can't you send for some friend?"

"There is only one whose going or coming could make any difference to me," said Victoria. "He has—'married a wife, and therefore he cannot come.'"

As she looked at the man before her, in whom her thoughts and sentiments of tenderness had been centred for so long, something of her old vivacity came back into her words. The tone and the little smile about her mouth made Robert's heart ache. "Perhaps it is ungenerous of me to ask, but have I ever failed you, Victoria?"

"Never," she emphasized, "and therefore the first time has an anguish all its own."

"You must forgive it," he said; "it is the irony of fate."

"Go," she whispered; "you must go at



once. You asked me if I wanted to ruin your life's happiness. I do not."

She looked at the clock. "What time does your boat leave?"

"Ten-thirty," he replied.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am."

"I think you are wrong," she made herself say, and to her joy she saw that his haste to leave her had passed.

"Sit down; you are shaking," he urged. "Let me ring for some stimulant for you. I can still stay a few moments."

"Please don't ring," said Mrs. Belford; "I feel no need of anything."

They sat down on a little sofa at the end of the room.

"He is unconscious; he has been in a stupor for three hours," she said.

"How was he yesterday?" questioned Robert.

"As usual," said Victoria; "you know."

The man gravely bowed his head. "I am not heartless," he said, "don't think it; but your worst enemy could not wish your life continued as it has been for four years past."

"Like a few other things, it has the affection that use brings," said Mrs. Belford. "I have

had something that needed me, that depended upon me—that loved me."

"And made you suffer terribly," said Halifax, "that absorbed your youth and strength, that has wrecked and ruined your life." He spoke with agitation. "You have been a marvel of patience and goodness."

She put her hand over his and held it a moment. "Thank you."

"You will be free," whispered Halifax, "and you have your child."

"Yes," she said, "I will be free. If what the doctor tells me is true, I shall be a widow."

Halifax made no reply. Mrs. Belford thought that if she had been free a year ago this man would have married her. This, which she believed firmly, and the fact that now it was too late, woke within her her worst self. She could have flung herself before him and besought him to remain; to have kept him she would have sold her soul. "If he misses his ship, if I can make him forget, if the fact is known that he was here with me, it will shadow his married life, even if the girl loves him well enough to forgive him." She believed, too, that, free, she would be a serious rival to Violet Halifax.

She rose. What made her take the decision

she never knew. "I must go back to my husband," she said, "and you must go to your wife as fast as you can, or you will miss your boat."

"I wish I could send some one to you," he said, earnestly.

"Never mind—never mind."

"Would you"—and his sympathy blinded him to the absurdity of his suggestion—"would you like me to telegraph my aunt Lydia to come to you?"

She actually smiled. "Dear boy," she said with tenderness, "my dear Bobby, you are delicious."

Halifax gave one look at the other room that opened its denser darkness into this. He took her hand and held it in both his. For a moment she kept him with her eyes, and then she almost pushed him from the room.

Disturbed, self-accusing, self-pardoning, harried by his feelings for the woman whose friend he had been, Halifax at last hastened to transact the errand for which he had run such great risks. He reached his original rooms, he put the key in the drawer of the wardrobe, it opened—it was empty. He opened every drawer in the room, he rang every bell in the room, and in answer to his questions,

with which he plied the servants, the maid who had helped Violet pack offered to go down on her knees and swear that she had seen the lady put the red-leather jewel-case in her steamer trunk.

Leaving minute directions for the search to be continued, and giving the name of his bankers, to whom the box must be sent if found, Halifax finally left the hotel. He took his hansom again and was flashed down Broadway, through the crowded streets, to the American Line. As he drove on to the dock, it seemed to him that a great many people were strolling about. The dock itself was wonderfully light, and this was not surprising, for the stretch so lately filled up by the great vessel was free as the day! Robert flung himself out of his cab.

"The boat's gone, sir," carelessly informed the man, who leaned over for his fee.

Halifax tore down the pier. "Violet got off, of course," he assured himself, and the group of faithful friends waving good-byes from the extreme edge of the bulkhead soon added Robert to their number. He pressed through them until he was among the first. There was the ship still near enough for him to distinguish the faces of the passengers,



but instead of scanning the crowd on the dock he scanned the waving line of departing travellers. He gave a gasp that was a groan. There stood his wife, fresh, sweet, smiling, talking with her usual charming animation to the man at her side, who was Patterfield West.

The deserted bridegroom dully stared. Then he screamed: "Take the pilot-boat! take the pilot back!" He waved his hat, his handkerchief. They wouldn't look at him, but his neighbors did, very interestedly, and giggled and sniggered.

"Violet! Violet! Take the pilot!"

She laughed maddeningly, but at some sally of Patterfield West's. Of her husband she was unconscious.

Then he ceased his Highland fling, his waving of arms, his mad gesticulating. He calmed to stone. What had she sent him back for, on a wild-goose chase? There was no jewel-case at the hotel. If she really cared for her trinkets to the point of weeping for them, would she have been likely to make that mistake? Would she have locked the drawer and taken away the key with her when the drawer contained nothing at all? How happy she looked—how radiant! He couldn't

swim out to the ship, but if he jumped in over the pier, wouldn't the *St. Louis* stop to rescue him? Ridiculous! they only did that in mid-ocean. The rowdies of the crowd around him were good enough chaps. They'd fish him and drag him back, wet as a rat. Halifax dismissed the idea. He had every one's attention but his wife's. Why come back with the pilot? Why should she? He was drinking in all that he could see of the sweetest face in the world. She was cheerful to hilarity, and she was leaving him—leaving him with another man, who was evidently going to England on the same ship with her. Scandalous! Hideous!

Little by little the faces became a long line of white visages—featureless, indistinguishable.

Chapter IX

COWARD!

WEST, after his hasty greeting with Halifax at the Astoria, went directly to his ship. He had learned, to his great annoyance, that all the Blank Company's passengers had been transferred to the steamer on which Mr. and Mrs. Halifax were starting away for their honeymoon. The evening before, he had seen Mrs. Belford after dinner. "Do send Mr. Halifax in, if you see him," she had said in parting.

"She found her own means to make him come," thought West, with slight scorn of them both.

He boarded the *St. Louis* among the last on-comers. The first person he saw was Mrs. Robert Halifax. She stood, evidently looking for her husband, and the sudden sight of her whirled West with the impetus of conflicting emotions.

"Halifax hasn't got here yet!" he ex-

claimed, and delightedly added, "We two are alone."

"Patterfield! Why are you on this ship?" Mrs. Halifax looked at him in great astonishment, and he hastened to answer:

"My ship—or rather, the part of an ocean vessel for which I paid a few dollars, together with the whole of the boat, has been burned at the docks. Didn't you know?"

"No," she frowned, "I didn't."

"Please," and he drew from his overcoat a folded newspaper, "please don't say you doubt me; here it is, even illustrated."

"Oh, of course," responded Mrs. Halifax, turning in her gloved hands a bunch of violets. ("How they match her eyes," thought West.) "Of course I believe you. Does Robert know?"

Her companion shrugged, thinking of the groom as he had last seen him going into Mrs. Belford's rooms.

"I'll tell him when he comes. And, by the way, where is he?"

"Oh, I sent him back to the hotel for my jewel-case which I stupidly left." She looked past Patterfield, scanning the on-comers. "But he ought to be here now. Let's get near the gang-plank so I can go ashore if he

shouldn't come." Getting near the gang-plank was no easy matter. Patterfield, leaning forward and searching the throng crowding on the pier, exclaimed, with sincere regret, "There's Halifax now, just coming on board."

"Are you sure?" she demanded, and failed herself to distinguish her husband's figure. Her companion laughed. "I'm sorry to say that I'm quite, quite sure." Mrs. Halifax, relieved, passed the jealous retort by unreproved. Indeed, she smiled at West, and forgave his presence on their ship and his intrusion into their honeymoon. He in turn gazed sadly at the radiant bride. She saw the shadow.

"I'm so happy," she thought. "Poor Patterfield!"

"Thank you for the flowers," she said, gently; "only you mustn't send me flowers or anything now."

The great, deep, vibrating whistle which sounded the *St. Louis'* departure was a climax to Violet's feelings of agitation and excitement. She watched the last bonds with her native land tossed and lifted into the air; the gang-planks rolled ashore; the huge cables swung back on to the deck; and the

sudden realization swept over her that nothing now could stop the ship in its relentless course. Within her command was no power sufficient, no matter what should happen, to alter the onward march over the wide ocean away from home. Handkerchiefs waved wildly in hysterical adieus, or covered nervously the tear-stained faces of those who could not control their grief at parting. Already across the ever-widening breach between the steamer and the land, the sound of voices calling, of wagons and carriages rumbling away, of dock hands shouting directions and messages, came with a touch of far-awayness. The crowd rushed to the end of the pier for a farewell glance; the more enterprising formed themselves into pyramids or phalanxes, singing and waving umbrellas and improvised flags. A sudden gust of wind brought a strong smell of the sea; somebody lost a hat overboard; one young girl, in a frenzy of excitement, as the final whistle sounded, threw an armful of roses towards some chosen friend on shore, and meanwhile the steamer moved steadily onward. A new voyage was beginning, the ship's crew were at their post, glad to be under way, indifferent to all else in the midst of so much human



agitation. As the last land sounds died away, Violet turned to find her husband, surprised that he should not have come to find her at so important a moment. "He's been abroad so often," she excused him to herself, "I suppose he doesn't care about seeing the start." But she was piqued, nevertheless, that he should not have wanted to be with her as they left home. She made a tour of the deck without finding him; she went below; she searched hopelessly through rooms that all looked alike, and that seemed narrow and crowded, with a strong odor of something she didn't relish, but was determined not to mind, as she supposed it was part of "going abroad." After being several times lost, she came, in some unaccountable way, on to the lower deck, where the steerage and second-class were already spreading themselves out and beginning to travel with vulgar publicity. She wanted to find the saloon, for she felt sure Robert would be there, but she did not care to show her inexperience and ignorance of travelling by asking questions so early in the voyage, so she made her way back again to the upper deck, where Patterfield West joined her, affirming again that he had seen Halifax come on board, and that he must be arrang-

ing some detail about the dining-table, or the rooms, or luggage. She was not altogether reassured, but she did not wish to have any appearance of running after her husband, so she accepted Patterfield's suggestion to go forward and have a look at the bay.

"It will be our last chance for some time to come," he said, pulling a chair out for her, "to see land."

She leaned back in the chair, the wind blowing her hair about lightly and seeming to refresh her and promise days of rest and happiness after so much hurry and excitement.

"I am so worried about my mother," she began, "but everything else is perfect. Poor mother has the grippe, and it is dreadful not to hear for a week."

"Don't worry," Patterfield answered, assuringly; "she will be well by the time you reach London. Just enjoy this beautiful scene. Look at that water. Did you ever see such fine lights and shades? And this air, isn't it great? There are only one hundred and fifty first-class passengers, so we shall have things pretty much to ourselves, and if the weather only favors us—"

"Where is the saloon on this boat?" Violet asked, putting her question so that it would



seem as though she knew where the saloons on all other boats were situated.

"It is forward, down the main companionway, just aft of the galleys."

Violet knew nothing about galleys or companionways. She must resort to some other ruse.

"Which flight of stairs would you go down if you wanted to reach it very quickly?"

"I should take the middle hatchway by the starboard gunwale."

"Oh!" said Violet.

Just then seven bells sounded directly over where she and Patterfield were sitting.

"Seven o'clock! it can't be possible. We sailed at ten. What does it mean? Something must have happened to their clocks on this steamer?"

Patterfield, smiling, explained the ship's way of counting time.

"How ridiculous!" was all his companion commented.

"Have you ever noticed," Patterfield questioned, "how many ridiculous things one sees as soon as one leaves home?"

"I have never left home before," she blushed.

"And has it ever occurred to you," Patterfield went on, without heeding her answer,

"that foreigners, when they leave their ridiculous homes, find our perfectly natural customs ridiculous, too? This is something to be kept in mind on a maiden trip abroad."

There was almost a tone of reproval in West's voice, and Violet felt lonely and embarrassed. She longed for Robert to appear and say that all was arranged for the voyage, that nothing need ever take him from her side again. But Robert did not come, and Patterfield, feeling that he had been perhaps severe, attempted to divert her by showing her the passenger list. She pretended to look through it; in reality her eyes rested on the two names printed together, "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Halifax."

"This is the first copy," said West. "The captain is a great friend of mine, and I am treated like a prince on this line. It's the fourteenth time I've crossed on it."

Violet said nothing. The gulls swept through the air, back and forth, now touching the waves, now disappearing beyond sight in the mist which was rising to veil the clear blue sky.

"It seems as though those beautiful birds had something to tell us, they come so close to the ship," she reflected, dreamily. Her

longing for Robert increased as the moments passed without bringing him.

"Trust your husband," was about the only advice Mrs. Bagsby had given her daughter in their farewell conversation. "He knows best, and never act as though you thought he didn't. Just you stick by him, whatever happens, and nothing bad 'll ever happen. That's how I've done with your father. I was jealous when we were first married, I can tell you, but I found it was only putting ideas in Mr. B.'s head, and I said to myself, 'He picked me out because he thought I was the best, and I guess he ain't going to change unless I change first, and so long as I keep lovin' and trustin' I guess he'll think I'm the best.' And that's how things have been for most twenty-five years."

Violet was not really jealous, but she remembered her mother's saying and decided to apply it in small matters as well as great.

"A penny for your thoughts," Patterfield asked.

"They are not worth a penny. Oh, no, I don't mean that, because they are about people I love. I mean I would not take a penny for them."

"There's just a little motion. Do you feel

it?" Patterfield changed the subject. "Shall you be able to go down for lunch at one o'clock? Sea appetites are famous. If you are a good sailor you will find meat pie delicious. You haven't been much on the water, though, have you?"

Here a steward interrupted. "Mrs. Robert Halifax, rooms 233-234?"

"Yes," Violet assented. "I think those are the numbers of our rooms."

"I can't find Mr. Halifax nowhere," the steward continued, "and the purser has to see him about his tickets. Could you come down, ma'am, please?"

"Of course." Violet rose and followed him. She was alarmed. What could have happened to Robert? He had had an hour to return to Thirty-fourth Street, get the forgotten box, and make the ship. They had come down with an automobile in twenty minutes. What could have kept him? He must be on the ship. Patterfield West had seen him. She hurried after the steward, trembling, and shaken by the thought of what such a calamity would mean. Robert left in New York, and she, his bride, irrevocably embarked for England. As she presented this picture to her mind she endured the combined feelings



of her mother, her father, her husband, Aunt Carrie, Birdie, Grove, all Robert's friends who called him their "dearest," his relations and business associates. What would they all think, and what could she do?

Patterfield West meanwhile hastened forward to the captain's room. Without any personal explanation he requested that a search of the ship be made for a friend of his, Robert Halifax, who was to have come on board that morning. Desiring to shield Violet as far as possible, he did not speak of her, but simply urged the captain that for business reasons it was necessary that he should know at once whether Halifax was among the passengers.

The captain despatched three messengers, and as he and Patterfield talked together the ship slowed up. He announced that they were about to drop the pilot, and excused himself to West, whom he begged to remain in his room until the information he required should be given him. The steamer had come to a full stop. Patterfield had peered out through the window and saw the light-ship rising and falling on the slow ground-swells. The first messenger returned. "The gentleman ain't on board, sir," was his response. The second



and third followed with the same verdict, after an interval of five or ten minutes.

This was a tragedy; something decisive must be done and at once. He hurried along the deck. It was crowded with people watching the pilot, and letters and telegrams being put off. He could not pass them. He hurried to the other side. The way was clear. He ran past the two vacant chairs where he and Violet had sat a few minutes before. Their conversation now seemed but the recollection of a dream. He plunged down the stairs and found Violet talking excitedly to the stewardess.

"May I speak to you a moment?" he asked, drawing her gently into the saloon. "Halifax," he said, rapidly but in a low tone—"Halifax has been detained in some unaccountable way. He is not on board."

She turned upon him, her eyes flashing. "I thought you were a man of honor!"

He started, amazed that she should speak in this way when his one thought was to protect her.

"You have deceived me." He remembered his assurance that he had seen Halifax, and began an explanation about the difficulty of recognizing a man who is making his way up the gang-plank.



"You have deceived me," she affirmed, indignation and grief causing her heart to beat with frightful rapidity. "You wished me to sail with you; you might have prevented my leaving; you were willing to ruin my name and character, my reputation and happiness. Coward!" She drew back from him. "You wished to avenge yourself."

Patterfield leaned towards her, and in a voice suffocated with emotion he said: "This is the greatest injustice. I thought of nothing but your safety. I believed until this moment that Halifax was on board. You know that after what has passed between us, no matter what my sufferings may have been, I could never wish anything but your happiness in every detail of your life. Take back these words you have used in a moment of excitement; take them back, I entreat you."

Violet, drawing away from him, repeated under her breath: "Coward! coward!"

"Listen!" he commanded. The first slow vibrations were felt of the steamer getting under way from the light-ship. Violet suddenly realized that for some reason they had stopped. "In an instant I shall have proved to you that what you say is false."

He sprang up the stairs, Violet following

him, dreading from his tone of voice that he might contemplate some rash deed. He pushed his way through the crowd; she waited in the doorway as if petrified by fear and dread; from the steamer's side he caught the cable which was still fastened to the light-ship, and, swinging his powerful frame on the railing, he glided hand over hand on to the deck of the smaller boat as the cable loosened and set the great *St. Louis* once more free.

The crowd, struck dumb by the sudden agility of Patterfield's reckless feat, speechless during its swift accomplishment, spellbound at this spectacle of bravery, which, attempted one moment later, would have meant a suicide, let forth their admiration and anxiety together in shouts and cheers of: "Bravo! Well done! Good work! First rate! Let her go!"

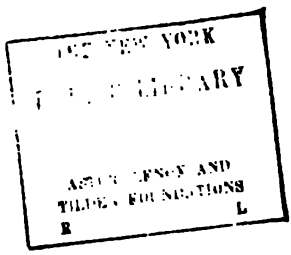
Mrs. Halifax, as she watched this strange and alarming scene, the culmination of all she had suffered during the last half hour, felt the world fading away out of her mind and memory in the same unaccountable way Patterfield had faded from her sight. She attempted to turn and find the staircase, in her longing to get below and shut herself away from noise and confusion, in her hope that fatigue had made her feverish, that she would





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find, with rest and quiet, that what she believed now to be the truth was only a hideous vision, the nightmare of an over-tired brain. She swayed as she put her hand out to take the banister, a strong arm was placed about her, saving her from a fall, and, as unconsciousness mercifully claimed her, she heard a far-off voice saying, "This one's not much of a sailor."

When she came to she was in her berth. Some one had put her to bed and unpacked her things. She lifted her eyes with an effort and sent them to search an explanation of where she was and who she was. They came upon Robert's unopened luggage in the opposite room, and then with a sudden flash of memory she realized that she was Mrs. Robert Halifax, starting for Europe, alone, on her bridal trip, with seven newsless days at sea before her, and beyond that—she knew not what. With this summons to reality came a flood of tears, tears that seemed of the same fire that was consuming her head and heart, tears whose uselessness she recognized, only to weep with deeper misery and despair.



Chapter X

"HOW SHOULD A ROSE KNOW?"

"WHY, my dear chap," a voice at Halifax's elbow exclaimed, "what in the name of heaven is the matter? You've missed your boat!"

The bridegroom turned his distorted visage to face Percy Burden, who had been his best man at the wedding.

"So it appears," he grimly confessed.

"I missed seeing *you* off, too," continued the other, unconscious of his burlesque. "I was late—awfully sorry!"

With Burden close at his side as he made his way along with the dispersing crowd, Halifax turned from the pier's edge.

He found his hansom, and thought (plunged in melancholy silence as he sat deep back in the corner, a heap of misery), "I am a bridegroom, that envied thing, a bridegroom! I wonder if any one would know it?"

"Drive to Bowling Green!" he called up to



the cabby, and vouchsafed to Percy, "I'm going to get my passage for Wednesday's boat." The unfortunate man forgot that he was not alone, and relapsed into a gloomy silence, while Burden, who felt that he must divert the crushed individual, chatted on cheerfully and irrelevantly, until his companion devoutly wished that he had chosen a deaf mute for groomsman.

Burden paused at length for breath, and Halifax felt that it here behooved him to say something. With a vivid picture in his mind of the couple on the ship's deck, he remarked, casually:

"Of course, my wife supposed that I was on board, you know."

"And why in thunder weren't you?"

The deserted husband briefly told him why.

"And you couldn't find the miserable jewel-case?" asked the sympathetic young man, at the story's end.

"No."

"You may have gotten into the wrong room, Bobby."

"I did." Halifax made a clean breast of his mistake, and told him in detail his interview with Mrs. Belford.

"Gad!" exclaimed Burden, "what a regu-



lar *belle dame sans merci* she is! No escaping her."

"No, no," disclaimed Robert; "on the contrary, she was perfectly superb!"

Burden shrugged. He was romantic, and always food for surprise, but before he could get very far on his quick train of thought his companion brought him up short again with, "Violet, of course, thought I was on the ship."

He emphasized his assertion with quiet force, and wished by all he held sacred that he believed it himself. At present jealous fury blinded his senses; his heart alone was speaking, and in spite of love and justice he was prey to a suspicious belief that his wife had sailed not knowing where her husband was, and with no thought save for West. He didn't intend, however, that Burden should dream the state of his feelings, and with the blindness of wounded love he thought he disguised them perfectly from his keen, imaginative companion.

"West seems to have made his steamer successfully," said Percy.

"His steamer!" reflected Robert. "It wasn't his steamer, either." At this idea his face contracted, but he coaxed its expression to a



smile sardonic. "He was very evidently on board!" he said aloud.

Percy Burden was the soul of indiscretion; aware of it, he usually fought shy of confidences. "It will be all over town to-morrow," he murmured, unconsciously.

Poor Halifax turned on him electrified. "What do you mean?"

Burden put his hand on his companion's knee. "Of course you and I know the simple facts of the case, as you have told them to me," he said, seriously, "but the question is how simple will the reporters think or make them out to be?"

"What reporters?"

"Why, all I saw and those I didn't see. Roads was on the pier—Roads, of *The City Items;* he's almost enough to wreck any 'happy home,' isn't he? Then, if he isn't sufficient, Steve Peters, of *The Earth,* with his detective camera fixed on Mrs. Halifax for keeps—come, come, old man!" (for Robert fairly ground his teeth).

"I will thrash the life out of him," he muttered, meaning West, but Burden didn't care to understand it so.

"The whole thing will be out to-morrow," he repeated, "except the truth."



Visions of the peaceful Bagsbys, visions of all his Chicago and New York friends, beginning with Mrs. Crawford-Crawford and ending with his aunt Halifax, made Robert shiver.

"You must go at once to the newspapers," he said, "and fix this thing up. Tell them the truth—it's picturesque enough, Heaven knows."

"The truth?" wondered Burden. "Just what *is* the truth here? On the other hand," he said to Halifax, "I am inclined to lie."

"To lie?"

"Well, I shouldn't tell them that the jewels were not found; it would look too much—too much—"

"Like what it was," groaned Robert to himself.

"—Like a wild-goose chase for you, old man," finished Burden for him.

The hansom stopped in front of the ship's offices, and Halifax got out.

"Say what you think best to prevent anything like scandal, but I believe the scare's all in your own mind"—he tried to smile—"in your vivid imagination. Look out that you don't excite suspicion where none is."

"No, no," soothed Burden; "don't be



alarmed on that head. No one saw you go into Mrs. Belford's rooms, luckily."

"He did. West saw me go in."

"What!" But he calmed at Robert's pallor and his icy, "Well, what?"

"Heavens, man, when you're not on the boat, West will tell your wife why."

Robert, without replying, turned on his heel and strode into the office. Wormwood added to gall.

Percy, a block or two further up-town, leaned out, bought an extra, glanced at it, directed the cabman to the Stock Exchange, and straightway forgot to-morrow's issues of newspapers, and scandals set afoot.

The mission to London had absorbed Halifax for months; it was the event of his professional career; he snapped his fingers at it now, and affirmed to himself that if a cable should be handed to him, calling his summons to London "off," it would find him indifferent to the change in fate. The thought of seeing his wife, the thought of seeing Violet in London, gave him no pleasure, as his jealousy rose to its height; he didn't want to see her. The remembrance of how she had insisted on his return to the hotel for a fruitless errand came to him in horrid frequency, coupled



with her assurance that West was sailing on another boat.

"Nothing," he said to himself, as he walked through the rooms of the —— Line and out of the door to the street—"nothing can affect me again; I have become dead to the world."

Here a newspaper boy rushed past him, calling out the title lines of his extra, and Halifax, "the dead to the world," was suddenly resuscitated! He seized the extra, glanced at it as Burden had done, sprang back into the cab, and there read the appalling figures of the market's opening.

He was already many thousands of dollars poorer than yesterday, but he comforted himself; there would surely be a rally, and Whyte, Raines & Co. held securities that would tide him over worse rocks even than these, which showed, nevertheless, startling, menacing.

He went at once to his brokers in Wall Street, and was told that both partners were "on the floor." Not even stopping to ask the quotations of his favorite specialties, he tore across the street to the Exchange, passing in side by side with a man whose white mask of nervous anxiety he knew for the face of a friend. The hurrying individual convulsively clutched Halifax by the arm.

"Whyte, Raines & Co. have gone to smash!" he exclaimed. Then, before he could see how close home his news had struck, he dropped Halifax and was lost in the howling, shrieking maelstrom, the whirlpool of excitement offered by the interior of the Stock Exchange. Halifax sent his name to both partners, and it seemed to him that he waited years. Finally he called another messenger, gave him a two-dollar bill, and told him to bring a reply of some kind at once, which in a few minutes proved to be that Mr. Whyte could not be found, and that Mr. Raines was sorry he couldn't leave the floor. Would Mr. Halifax send in his message?

Hades let loose danced before Halifax. The atmosphere of the great room was an envelope of mist, through which men rushed from group to group, shrieking their demands and offers. Shower after shower of white bits of paper fluttered through the air. Black-coated members mingled with gray-coated messengers carrying telegrams which, before their contents could be read, were worthless, because the lightning-falling scale of prices had made their senders bankrupt.

Men appeared to be going mad, to have lost much of the semblance of human beings, and



the accumulation of cries was a dull, hoarse clamor overreached now and again by a voice higher pitched than the rest. As the hour drew near for the closing, the hubbub increased. Halifax gave up all hope of seeing either Raines or Whyte. Grimshorn opened at 75—it was now hawked in the streets at 25, and no bids; other stocks had fallen in like ratio. If the rumors were fact that Whyte, Raines & Co. had failed, then securities which, in order to sell readily by cable, he had left unregistered and in his firm's hands, had gone under, his cash balance as well.

At this point Burden dashed out from the crowd, and Robert caught him.

"Bobby," he announced, before a question could be asked, "Whyte, Raines—"

"Yes, yes; it's true, then?"

"The worst—not a cent on the dollar, and, moreover, it's not a clean page."

"Busted—penniless?"

"Up the spout."

"Let's go into the gallery," said Halifax, "and watch the horror."

They made their way up with difficulty into the galleries, filled to overflowing with those who could afford to be curious, and who were only spectators of the tragedies represented



beneath them in the crowd. From the height the companions looked at the records on the boards before their eyes: "Grimshorn, 23. Q. R. & S., 50."

(Halifax had bought it at 110 and considered it cheap.) Like history was repeated all over the room. Standing apart from the general mass, the centre of a little group of men, was James Raines. He looked several hundred years old. The ruined broker was minutely tearing up bits of paper to infinitesimal morsels, sowing them on the air, fruitless seeds! Two men, nearly as white and tense as he, were talking excitedly to him. Burden touched Halifax on the arm.

"How much does it mean, old man?"

"Everything, almost. I've got my Chicago house—it's mortgaged—and a little bank balance. And you?"

"Bitten hard." Percy tried to smile with his usual gayety. His derby was far back on his blond head, his expression much affected by the palpitating fever of excitement. "Bitten hard, but not quite devoured. It will take every cent I can scrape together to tide me over, but I guess I shall swim out somehow."

"Come!" Halifax abruptly turned. "Let's

get away. I want to go over and see Whyte, if he's at the office."

As they made their way into the street, "Mr. Whyte," remarked Percy, "left the building a little while ago. He looked terribly cut up, poor old man."

There was a crowd in front of No. — Wall Street clear out into the middle of the street, curiously looking up and looking in.

"Fire?"

"No," replied a bystander to the gentlemen; "somebody's been shot."

Burden and Halifax pressed into the building, past the rabble. The door of the office of Whyte, Raines & Co. was guarded by police. "No admittance; Mr. Whyte, senior partner, shot himself in his private room only an hour ago."

They asked to see a clerk, and as soon as the man summoned recognized Halifax entrance was assured. When, an hour later, the two came out again, the crowd had been dispersed and business was over for the week. Already the narrow street had assumed its Saturday demeanor. A few yards away an automobile, waiting for a job, was drawn up by the curb; the conductor, attending to his machine, whistled gayly, with a peculiar



birdlike sweetness. Halifax looked upon him in stupid wonder at his light-heartedness. The vehicle was waiting for a fare, and the two men climbed in.

"Drive to ——'s," said Halifax, thickly.

As they ordered their drinks, Robert put up a prayer that no one would be in sight whom he knew, and for once he was fortunate. The faces around them were all strange.

"You say it isn't a clean page?" asked Halifax, and added, "If there's any ugly handling, it isn't Whyte," and he made a strange simile:

"Whyte was true as a trigger."

His drink pulled him together. "Almost all that money I made with my brain," he thought. "I can make my money again. My profession is worth thirty thousand a year to me. Yesterday I sat and talked with Whyte in the hotel, while Violet was handling West's roses. How can I restore yesterday—and my faith in the one woman in the world?"

A day or two before he had deposited ten thousand at the —— Bank. It was now his all. The automobile bumped along up Broadway, in the fresh, bright rays of the winter noon. The cars went clanging past, and the



faces of the passers-by wore nothing of the tragedies in love or finance.

Burden had pulled out a little Russia-leather case, and with his gold pencil was adding up columns of figures, his fair brows drawn over the first wrinkle of real significance he had ever worn.

"What time does your ship sail to-morrow, Bobby?" he asked, with his usual irrelevance. "Ten? Well, you'd better go on board to-night," he smiled, putting his little leather book back in his pocket. "From what I remember about your dashing story of the day, Victoria Belford must be a widow."

"I shall not go to see, but you might, if you like. She's quite alone here, and you always got on well together."

They had reached the hotel where Halifax was to stop the night. "I think I will," nodded Percy. "Just tell him, the Astoria, will you?"

West's voyage on a pilot-sloop back to the city he had left under such pleasant auspices had not an agreeable effect upon his spleen. He was willing to promise never to set sail in a sloop again, and prayed that his next departure might be on a vessel good for three thousand consecutive miles. Over and over he



told himself that he would "like to smash Robert Halifax's head"; even when the state of the markets revealed to him that, had he landed in England, he would have had to turn round again and sail directly for New York, this didn't make him give a kindly thought to Halifax; he put the bridegroom down in his mental register as the last of cads. He scorned this deserting of a woman at the point of their honeymoon departure. Violet's husband, least of all, could be tenderly handled by her still ardent lover. "I sent Mr. Halifax back for my jewels," Mrs. Halifax had explained to him. And Halifax had run like a messenger! "Oho!" West sneered in his thought of it. "No doubt too willing an emissary! Had he not gone to Mrs. Belford?"

West reached New York late and decided to dine at the club of which he was an out-of-town member. On his way up Broadway and Fifth Avenue he turned over in his mind the events of the last forty-eight hours. "I yield that woman the palm," he thought. "How well she played her cards! What ruse could she have employed to get him to miss his ship? Ugh! the brute! But my wings are clipped; I can't fly a yard," he mournfully



confessed. "I have played the melodramatic hero to no use. I can't go up to Halifax and call him names, because it would harm her, and, besides all this, she loves him so confoundedly well!"

He mounted the steps of his club and went in side by side with Percy Burden.

"Hal-lo!" greeted the youth, and stared at the Chicagoan as though he saw a ghost.

West remembered him slowly. "Who—the deuce—why, Halifax's best man, of course." No one introduced by Halifax's name could please him then. "Good-evening." He lifted his hat with little effusion.

"Why, West," said Burden, "where the dickens do you come from? Wouldn't the seas have you? I saw you sail away to Liverpool at 10 A.M."

"Oh, you are mistaken," returned the other, coolly.

"Then you've got a double, and he will cause you trouble," rhymed the younger. "Are you dining here?"

"Yes, with friends," hastened West.

"And you'll need them, my formal gentleman," thought Percy to himself, "if you get in the track of the angry man whom I left cursing you up and down. But," he said,



aloud, "really, my dear man, you're the greatest surprise I've ever had, except one."

"Ah!" West scarcely questioned him.

"And that other one was Halifax. When I saw poor Bobby on the pier this morning you could have knocked me down with a feather."

West would have chosen a club. He hoped to get rid of this smiling youth. ("Poor Bobby on the pier. Then Halifax had made a dash for decency.")

They went in side by side towards the café. "Now for the last straw," continued Percy. "I suppose I shall be meeting Mrs. Halifax next!"

And West turned on him. "See here, you had better not mention Mrs. Halifax's name," he said, very low. "I don't want to get mixed up in any scandal, but chiefly I don't want her name in every one's mouth, I warn you. You had better keep your reflections to yourself, and keep Halifax away, too."

Burden laughed aloud, and what he would have said was nipped in the bud, for here a group of men joined them, and personal matters hung fire.

Meanwhile Halifax had been chewing a bitter cud. Whether or not he were without

faith in womankind, and, scandalous to consider, utterly without faith in his wife, he, at all events, could not clear his mind of the disagreeable impression coupled to the unelucidated mystery of the past. The letter on the mantel-shelf, which he had read not a month ago, waved its aggravating words: "Violet, darling, my hope and my reward, thank God it is my right—" Love had made Halifax ask her to marry him; she had accepted him from pique, perhaps, on the spur of the moment — not an unique case by any means! She had doubtless loved West all the time. The meeting on the Limited, the long, earnest conversation of the two, her quick acceptance of an invitation that included West for dinner on the train—the final temptation had been too great for her. His hate at this point for West took such proportions that had West sprung up then and there Halifax would have attacked him like a madman. No fear of this! West was dining like a lord with friends, Stetson, of the *Times-Herald*, among them. Over his dinner he cleared his mind and fettered his conscience, while Stetson, eager for copy, and perfectly unscrupulous, filled in cleverly all that West suggested, only touching his champagne as West drained his.



"It is," said one man, "perfectly incredible if you haven't seen Mrs. Belford."

"It is," snarled West back at him, "perfectly incredible if you have seen Mrs. Halifax."

And all this not twenty yards from where the wretched bridegroom walked up and down, hopeless as a spirit condemned. Whenever he thought to give the morning's events a natural color, his jealousy blended all tones to its green, condemning hue.

"There was the pilot; she could have returned; she could have telegraphed; she could have sent West back—pah!"

He seemed to himself a fool whenever he sought to excuse in the face of facts.

Some one joined his melancholy stroll. "Halifax, will you come in on a little game—Foster, Jones, and Pyle, the old rascals?"

Halifax rarely played—he could almost say never—but his luck was phenomenal when he did.

He smiled grimly and thought of his frail bank balance.

"Why, yes, I'll take a hand," he acquiesced. He had a great need to forget.

The man who spoke had just dropped out of the game, and took Halifax back to the



small room where the men mentioned were seated at the table.

As yet all New York did not know that Halifax was sailing that day for London with his bride. Halifax gave thanks that these men were among the ignorant, and that they merely greeted him cordially, congratulated him on his marriage, and dealt him his cards.

His usual good luck was with him, and in the success of the first few hands he was able to get away from his personal meditations.

The game was high, and the piling chips before Robert footed up into the thousands; it stimulated him for a moment. What if he should recover a bit; he bent over the pile with something like a flash of the true gambling passion—and then, poor as he was, dangerous as it was for his attention to leave the game, his mind went hammering back at the old tune.

"What difference does anything make?" he mentally shrugged. The loss of his entire fortune had not been shock sufficient to turn his thoughts from his wife. With his first loss, ill chance, which had so utterly claimed him of late for her own, fastened her horrid claws on the prey. Here Stetson and Burden wandered in, and Percy fairly gasped as he



saw Robert pay five hundred dollars for cards.

"Gad!" he whispered to Stetson, "Wall Street hasn't even feazed Bobby; his nerve is colossal."

"Whyte, Raines & Co.?" whispered Stetson, with as little interest as he could affect, and a man on his left informed him to a clear detail how very bare Halifax had been picked.

The players and by-standers little knew the current of thought that this young man pursued. He impassively accepted his losses, drawing from the dealer with perfect *sang-froid*, thinking meanwhile of but one thing, the mighty ship cleaving its way through the ocean, carrying on its distant course his heart's desire.

Just here a man bending over watching the game let fall a small red rose-bud from his coat's lapel. The flower dropped on the table directly in front of Robert Halifax. The hot room had warmed the little bud to yield all its close-shut sweetness; it swept upward its faint perfume to Robert, who saw in a flash the roses red of the night before as they glowed on the table of the private room at the Astoria. He saw, too, the rose in Violet's dress.



"It's your ante, old man," Jones informed him, impatiently.

Halifax responded, but his feelings had gone through a miraculous change; a spring on a sudden set in working order a new set of shuttles, altering the pattern of the stuff.

He remembered with a rush the evening with his wife. (He should have remembered it like this before.) With a delicious surge the memories of her charm, her sweetness, her beauty, came over him. He made a low exclamation.

"Too bad, old chap," Burden was saying at his side. "Better stay out this time."

Halifax looked at his cards. "Luck must turn," he muttered. "I've paid for my passage to London—to her," he thought, "to her."

His blood tingled through his veins as he recalled how lovely she had looked leaning back in her chair, and he heard her tone of tender irony when she offered to send away West's flowers. Halifax at this point fully acquitted his wife.

"What a brute I am—what a fool—to dare to question such purity, to question her love!" His heart beat painfully, and the cards danced before his eyes. He drew one card and kept



raising the man who was betting against him. He made a poor bluff; his changed emotions challenging the old. Jones paid to see his hand, and Robert laid down "a busted flush," displaying it smilingly with singular *sang-froid;* he seemed almost glad! He drew his check for close on to ten thousand dollars. Burden was white for him; the hand he laid on Halifax's arm was quite cold. Stetson long since had gone, and was even now sending his messages hard and fast over the wires.

"You're deep up to your neck, Bobby," said Burden.

"So it seems." Halifax had turned away with his friend and stopped to light a cigar. "I've paid for my passage, you know, and the Lord will temper the wind—"

Burden thought his friend must have lost his mind; greatly disturbed, he looked at the new Halifax, from whom the tension of the day's events had passed. His eyes were bright, his countenance was beaming.

"Never mind," soothed Percy; "we'll fix things up. I can get the old gentleman to plank down for me, I dare say. I'll see you through, Bobby, for the present."

"You're pure gold—pure gold. I shall be



reinstated in a few years, and Grimshorn will rise; but I want to assure you of one thing, I have married the dearest, best girl in the world!"

"Of course — of course," agreed Percy. "West—"

"Just that. West was an old friend of my wife" (he said the word with tender pride). "I am awfully glad he is on the boat to look after her, poor little girl! You understand me?"

Burden stared open-mouthed.

"Why, I've been waiting to tell you," he stammered. "West—" and got no further, for Patterfield West, in the flesh, and rather enlivened, strolled in from the billiard-room. The two men, whose feelings towards each other had grown to the striking-point, stood facing.

Halifax, doubting his senses, greeted him with:

"Where, in God's name, did you come from? How did you get here?"

"I walked," replied the other, with a cool laugh. "I'm an aquatic expert." He regarded Halifax with keen dislike.

Robert crimsoned to his hair.

"You will forgive me," he said, quietly,



"if I ask for news of Mrs. Halifax. You were with her on the ship. What can you tell me of her?"

The more impotent West became as he saw Halifax's sincerity, the angrier he was with him. Burden had discreetly withdrawn; he stood smoking a little distance away.

"I have no news for you," returned the Chicago man, curtly. "Mrs. Halifax was looking as lovely as she always does; she seemed well. It's a pity"—he glared at the bridegroom—"that she isn't better protected."

Halifax bowed slightly; he wasn't even angry; his relief at West's appearance was too great. "I will endeavor to repay you for your consideration for my wife," he returned.

"I wonder whether you can." The man who had made his melodramatic swing down the ocean steamer's side looked significantly at one hand bandaged and swathed (the rope had cut deep). The significance was lost to his companion, who bowed to him with too much *prestance*, swung on his heel, and strode away. In a few moments he was without the building, walking down town in the cold winter night.

West slipped completely from his consideration; in his tumultuous thoughts this



man had no place. Halifax in twenty-four hours had possessed everything, and in the same circle of time lost it all. Of his power to reconstruct his house of fortune he was confident, and "the faith of yesterday in the dearest woman in the world" was his again. Memories, freely indulged, gave him thrilling proof that Violet loved him, and when, for a second, assailed by the poisonous thought that convention and the world may have made the two departing ones repent at the last moment, he trod it out of life like a serpent.

His hand in his overcoat pocket found the red rosebud, the disenchanter from a baleful spell, and now he held his amulet close in his palm, and the night he had thought crude and beautiless when he entered the club a few hours before became ablaze to him like a diadem; the electric lights shone out white and clear. Even the stragglers passing him appeared gay mortals, whose steps were elastic, whose spirits ran festive.

"I believed before I saw," he thought; "we are told that is a blessed thing." To this contrast with his past misery his changed mind let him revel, and then he really thought of Violet! Anxious, strange to travel, wondering about him a thousand things, and she

did not even know the bankers' address. He would wire her to the ship's care, and be, at the worst, only a day or two behind her. With this union of trust and love he began to plan for their wedded life and to curse the ill fate which had beggared him at the dawn of their honeymoon.

"Wiped out," he groaned. "I must begin at the beginning again. And if Grimshorn 'rises and shines,' it can be nothing to me."

He glanced up at the metallic sky, where the stars were little distinct dazzling points, and he began to surround his wife, across the many miles between them, with protecting love. From the depths of his heart he breathed a vow.

"Violet, dearest!" and so devoted and strong was his emotion that if thought is transmitted, this wave must have kissed the shores of Violet's sleep.



Chapter XI

THE GATHERING STORM

DURING the days succeeding the wedding, a violent attack of the grippe had kept Mrs. Bagsby a prisoner to her room, too ill to follow the doings of the outside world. Her husband had brought her the telegram from the "children," as he called Violet and Halifax, but she had seen nothing of the newspapers nor of the scandal they contained. Bagsby unfolded this before his eyes at breakfast on Thursday morning; he pushed the paper from him, rubbed his spectacles, and took another look. There was no mistake; there it stood in black and white, a scandal about his daughter, about Violet, and about the man he had trusted her to marry, his son-in-law.

"Anything the matter, Camden?" Aunt Carrie asked, alarmed at his sudden change of expression.

"Yes," he answered, "there is. Have you



finished your breakfast? I'd like to speak to you in my study if you have."

"Oh, yes, I've finished, and I couldn't eat another thing now, anyway," she answered, in a flutter of excitement.

"I say, hold on, pop," Grove ejaculated, with his mouth full. "I've got to have another buckwheat cake."

"Finish as soon as you can, my boy."

From his study table he rang four bells; the different members of the household from below stairs and above appeared, one after another, on the threshold. Grove, last of all, slid in, bringing his napkin with him and polishing off his mouth and face furiously.

"I've called you all in here," he began, "to speak to you about something that concerns Miss Violet—Mrs. Halifax."

Those of the servants who had read the papers had a conscious look. Miss Bagsby was greatly agitated; Grove alone appeared to be enjoying the moment and anticipating the next.

"There was some mistake about Mr. Halifax getting off on the steamer with his wife"—chorus of sympathetic "ohs" and "ahs." "He will, of course, leave by the next boat for London," Bagsby assured, "but it ap-



pears that Mr. Halifax has also met with heavy losses in Wall Street"—further demonstrations from Aunt Carrie and the household; "the newspapers, I'm sorry to say, have made this series of misfortunes the framework for a scandal which they publish this morning. It is all here"—he turned to his sister—"just as though Robert was a professional gambler, and as though Violet had wanted to go off by herself. These journalists should be made to suffer some punishment," and then, again addressing them all, he said: "This matter will be discussed, of course. I shall communicate with Mr. Halifax to-day, by wire or telephone, and everything'll be cleared up, but there's one thing I've called you up here specially for. I don't want Mrs. Bagsby should hear a word of this. She's got some fever yet, and it'd be the worst thing in the world for her to have any excitement. You understand it's not to be spoken of."

There was a murmur of assent among the servants, who took this as their dismissal. He had made as light as possible of the affair, dreading, above all things, publicity, but in his heart he could find no excuse for his son-in-law—this young man who promised to be

a son had betrayed the first trust placed in him. Rage and indignation suffocated Bagsby. He turned to his sister, who was re-reading eagerly the newspaper accounts.

"You better go up to Em," he said, feeling irritated at the presence of some one who looked upon this disgrace in the light of gossip. She left with promises of secrecy. Before Bagsby could make up his mind what step to take first, his secretary, Raikes, came in with a pile of letters. He was a discreet young Englishman, who pleased the manufacturer by his silence on all matters other than business, except in cases where his employer proposed the topic. He would not on any account have referred to the present misfortune, but when Bagsby opened the conversation, he found his auditor well posted.

"I fear," Raikes said, after they had discussed the affair for some time, "there is no doubt as to the authenticity of the gambling report."

"What's your reasons?"

"I saw the city editor of the *Times-Herald* last night. He says Stetson was in the room when Mr. Halifax paid out his last penny."

Bagsby's face seemed to shrink and shrivel



as though to evade the confirmation of this report. There was but one thing that could be worse in his opinion.

"What do they say got into Halifax? He'd never gambled before. It's a strange enough affair. How'd he come to miss the boat?"

Raikes would have been glad to be spared this question, but now that Bagsby put it directly to him, he answered it directly.

"There's a woman in the affair, I fear. Mr. Halifax returned to the Waldorf for his wife's jewels, which Mrs. Halifax had left in the closet. About the time the boat was to have sailed he was seen coming out of Mrs. Belford's room on the floor below the apartment he'd occupied the night before, where the jewels were left."

Bagsby's measure of suffering was complete. He got onto his feet slowly, as though trying to shoulder the new burden. He crept back and forth over his old track by the chimney. Meanwhile the secretary sat motionless, and the silence prolonged itself until he concluded that for the first time in their intercourse his employer had forgotten him.

At last the door opened, and a telegram was brought in. "Open it," Bagsby said to the secretary, who tore the yellow envelope,



drew out and unfolded the message, read it, and looked up.

"Well?" demanded Bagsby.

"No news," answered the Englishman. "It's from the works. You can't expect news, I'm afraid," he ventured, "at least not from Mrs. Halifax. She is still on the ocean, and will be until Tuesday of next week. Mr. Halifax, I understand, took yesterday's ship."

Bagsby rose at this name and brought his strong round fist down onto the table with a violence of which his mild young secretary had not supposed him capable.

"Let me never hear that name again!" he cried. "We have been disgraced by it. God only knows what harm it has brought upon my daughter. If you wish to speak of her call her Violet, or Bagsby—call her anything but Halifax." He fell into his old stride back and forth by the fireplace, his face flushed with anger, his eyes sharpened by tears that indignation crystallized before they could flow.

"She shall not bear that man's name, not while I live and can prevent it. He's dishonored us. Is this the new idea of marriage? Flirting and gambling before your honeymoon's even begun? It's my fault,



too; I'd no right to let the girl marry a man we knew nothing about ourselves, except for his newspaper reputation, and his pleasing the ladies in society. I'm the one to blame, and it's too late now," he added, slowly, something in this self-reproach acting to dissolve the crystals in his eyes. "The girl's life is ruined at the very outset"—he sank down into the big chair by the table and bent his head over his folded arms, repeating to himself—"ruined, and I'm to blame!"

Determined to prove his own wrong, he felt some chastisement in this self-inflicted reproach. Striking the tears from his face, he continued to explain how mistaken and weak he had been in letting a stranger carry off his daughter.

"The Lord will punish me for this," he said, with a conviction that suggested he meant to help the Lord.

Troubled and embarrassed at so much emotion, Raikes rose, glad of what seemed a chance to get away.

"You take it too much to heart, Mr. Bagsby," he said; "things are never as bad as they seem at first. This'll all be cleared up."

"Cleared up or not cleared up, that young



man sha'n't ever get Violet in his keeping again, not while I'm alive."

Once more Raikes started towards the door, the idea of getting away, the thought that he was an intruder, uppermost in his mind.

"Where are you going?" Bagsby asked. "Come and sit down here. We've got a lot of work to do between now and to-morrow." A bunch of business papers lay under his hand on the table. He ran his fingers through them and let them drop as though they were of little importance now.

"I must find my child," he reverted. "I must find her. I can't stay here when she's suffering over in strange countries. When's the next steamer going?" he asked, sinking into the leather chair by the fire. "You see to it that we have passages engaged; we'll get off as fast as we can, I guess, Grove and all. But don't let Mrs. Bagsby know," he repeated, almost mechanically, the old worry assuming temporary mastery over the new. "She mustn't know while she's got fever. I'd like to have you go along, too," he added, in a friendly manner, "but there's no one I rely on as I do you to look after the Chicago office." He slid forward in the big chair, placing one hand over either knee. "It's



uncertain when we'll be home; the spring's always a busy time with us up at the factory, and I think you'll just about find your hands full." He looked up over his glasses, as though this prophecy were the pleasantest he could make to a young fellow starting out. "There'll be plenty for you to do, and if it's well done"—his eyes twinkled—"I don't say but what it may result in a share of the business management being entrusted to you permanently. It would be the best thing that could happen to you," he exclaimed, lifting his hands from his knees and bringing them back again with an emphatic stroke by way of punctuating his sentences, and warming, as he talked of his life's work, into a moment's forgetfulness of the disaster. "The very best thing, clean, pure stuff, put honestly on the market, and warranted to do good to all who use it. What better connection could you have than with Bagsby's bronchial capsules?"

"It is exactly as you think best, Mr. Bagsby," the secretary said, respectfully. "I wish to be useful to you, and it is for you to decide where my services are most required."

"I guess you'll make your way all right," Bagsby responded. "The eternal fitness of



things is something most young folks don't catch onto at your age. It ain't as important as book-learning, perhaps, but I've found it a mighty good substitute. It'll take a load off my mind to have you here," he concluded, moving over to his desk. In this transition, the friendly Bagsby who had chatted with Raikes as he might with a son, the angry Bagsby who had stormed as an irate father, vanished from the luxurious easy-chair by the fire, and a reserved, severe Bagsby took his accustomed place by a pile of letters and papers. The secretary understood that business was the topic; all matters, however slightly personal, had been put aside; he had now to deal with Bagsby the prosperous capsule manufacturer, with the Bagsby who held in his quick, decisive manner the secret of success.

Of the anger that had thundered out against Halifax there was nothing left, but the same force which had made that genuine was now acting in another current. Like an engineer to whom endless motive power is supplied, Bagsby turned this power into whatever channel he chose, controlled and regulated it, made with it all the variations of a strong character, from the tenderness that was a refuge for the



weak and friendless, to a destructive wrath that threatened to consume the son-in-law who had disgraced him.

One by one the undertakings were discussed which Raikes was to direct during his patron's absence; lunch-time found the two men still at work.



Chapter XII

MRS. BAGSBY'S DAY AT HOME

BEFORE Robert's appearance in the Bagsby horoscope, Violet and her mother, planning a Chicago winter, had sent out cards for a large afternoon reception in January. During the excitement of the wedding, this was forgotten, but one of the young bride's parting messages to her mother was what to wear and how to receive on the following Thursday.

"Why, they won't anybody want to see me," Mrs. Bagsby had protested, but the girl assured her, and she had consented on the condition that Birdie might pour tea. "There's lots of these people I don't even know. Your father and I haven't kept track of all your new friends, and I'll need Birdie to tell me who folks are."

In spite of the grippe, in spite of newspaper scandals, in spite of a tragedy in the family, Mrs. Bagsby, innocent of all but Violet's

command, got heroically ready for the afternoon party. Her husband, to her surprise, had remained at the office, which disappointment she accounted for by his indifference to society. Grove, under some pretext of Aunt Carrie's about keeping the house quiet, had been sent off to play with a friend, relieved at not having to appear again in his velvet suit, and satisfied with the compact he and the butler had made concerning cakes and candy.

"If you're going to wear your purple velvet, Em," Aunt Carrie began, coming into the room where her sister-in-law was dressing, "I guess I'll wear my pink taffeta with the blue ribbons; my white chiffon never did set good in the back."

"Has Birdie come?" Mrs. Bagsby asked. The dizzy feeling in her head, now she was up, inclined her to count eagerly upon Miss Atkinson's help with her daughter's "young people." She had arrived, however, and, it appeared, was already entertaining a friend in the library.

"Now, isn't that lucky? I never should have been ready to receive at such an hour. And there that girl is sitting and talking as though she'd been at it all day. Give me a few of the bronchitis capsules, Mary," she



added to the maid, who slipped them into her pocket.

In the drawing-room, Mrs. Bagsby served a long and tiresome apprenticeship, seated near the door, where she might rise hastily at the sound of the bell, and drop her worsted shawl behind the sofa, as though she had never had the grippe. At five o'clock the bell rang twice. Both visitors were young gentlemen for Miss Atkinson, who were shown immediately into the library. Mrs. Bagsby, feeling the effects of her illness, made some excuse to Caroline about draughts, and the sisters moved their chairs together nearer the fire.

"Late calls are the fashion," Aunt Carrie explained. "Up at Grand Rapids nobody comes in much before five."

"It's most half-past five now," Mrs. Bagsby answered. "I told Vi they wouldn't none of her friends care for me when she was gone."

"It is almost a pity you got up," said Caroline.

"I guess likely there'll be somebody in before long. It's kind of a bad day out, anyhow. So slushy."

Secretly Aunt Caroline was somewhat relieved at the dearth of visitors, for she had been afraid that something might be said

which would reveal the misfortune Bagsby was determined to conceal. "Though to see her now," Caroline commented to herself, sweeping her glance over Mrs. Bagsby's portly frame and flushed face, "you wouldn't think she'd ever been ill a day in her life."

Meanwhile, fashionable Chicago was not oblivious of the fact that this was Mrs. Bagsby's day at home, nor were they sentimental enough to stop calling as soon as Violet left. They had merely read the newspaper scandal. Some did not dare go, not knowing how to greet Mrs. Bagsby. Others were sure there wouldn't be any tea. The leaders were afraid of being criticised by their followers, and the followers feared to budge lest the leaders should find it out. Above kindly, neighborly interest for Mrs. Bagsby, above curiosity, even, was the determination to be in the swim. Miss Halifax was away; Mrs. Crawford-Crawford, like her hostess, was a victim to grippe; Victoria Belford's deep mourning kept her and a few of her friends who were among the daring society women from appearing in Mrs. Bagsby's drawing-room, where she waited patiently all afternoon, her kind heart finding every motherly excuse but the right one to give for her guests.



Towards six, one or two *invités*, who were on the ragged edge of society, came in, too pleased at having been asked for the first time to resist the satisfaction of recounting at smaller teas, where they would be the bigger lights, how Mrs. Bagsby received, and what the inside of the Bagsby house was like.

Their departure was followed by Bagsby's appearance on the threshold of the drawing-room door, an air of inquisitive timidity about him. He generally walked on tip-toe when there was any one making a social call in the house. He caught the string of his glasses, which were swinging from side to side over his well-filled waistcoat, and, leaning into the room, he said, in a cheerful whisper:

"All gone?"

Mrs. Bagsby's cold had left her too deaf to hear this remark, but Aunt Carrie answered, glad of a chance to speak, after sitting all afternoon in her best clothes:

"Your Chicago folks are scared of the weather. I never saw a little storm like this keep the Grand Rapids people from an afternoon reception, nor an evening one, either, as far as that's concerned," she finished to herself, while Bagsby, reassured, came over the threshold and begged for more particulars.



His face darkened as the meaning of this fiasco explained itself to him. He must suffer all the cruel consequences of Robert's disgrace. The position he had built up for himself, "the ladies' wide acquaintance in Chicago," to which he was fond of referring with his business friends, all was to be demolished by the reckless conduct of a son too hastily adopted.

"I'm just as tired," said Mrs. Bagsby to her husband, "as though the whole four hundred of Chicago had been here."

He could no longer keep up the deceit.

"Something very serious has happened," he began, with a hasty assurance. "The girl's well."

"Well, what then?" asked his wife.

As simply as possible he told the incidents of Robert's failure to meet the boat, of his losses in Wall Street, of his gambling, and even of Victoria Belford's share in the miserable affair.

Mrs. Bagsby was very solemn when he reached this part of the story.

"It may be, Camden Bagsby, that Robert Halifax has been led off to gambling by some foolish companions. Boys will be boys, you know how that is. But you can't make me



believe, I don't care how much you try, that he's been foolin' around with some other woman. I just don't believe one word of it, and you can't make me."

She spoke with so much conviction and assurance that her voice sounded like a verdict; Bagsby and Aunt Carrie felt a little ashamed that they had not waited until all the evidence was in before passing judgment.

"God grant you're right," murmured the father, "but the story's come so straight it can't be false."

Choked with sudden emotion as she realized that Violet was alone in such trouble, Mrs. Bagsby rocked back and forth, repeating, "My poor child, my poor child!"

"My idea," said her husband, coming over to her, "is to get to the girl as fast as we can. We'll take Grove, and Carrie's coming along, too. The sooner we get off the better; in fact, I've engaged passage on the Saturday's ship, but I didn't know as you could be ready so soon."

"Be ready!" she exclaimed. "Why, I'm ready now!"

"How about you, Carrie?" asked her brother.

"Well, of course," she said, as though he



ought to have known it, "I can get ready. But it does just seem the irony of fate that, after waiting all your life to go abroad, you should have to pack up and sail at a few hours' notice!"



Chapter XIII

THE WANING OF THE HONEYMOON

FROM her berth the young bride informed herself as far as possible of the ship's progress and day of arrival. In the semi-obscurity of her cabin, day and night seemed alike, some slow, interminable measurement of time, wherein her anxiety prolonged itself. The captain was kind, the stewardess a devoted attendant. But she wished no sympathy. She presumed that West's reckless feat must have excited much comment. She preferred, however, to think of herself as the only one knowing the truth; she was determined to confide in nobody. She surrounded herself with books and needlework, letters and games; the effort at diversion ended in tears of anxiety for the husband to whom she feared some evil had befallen. She could not write to her parents; pride kept her from giving the true report of her new-made husband; she could not telegraph Robert, for he would have sailed

before her message could reach him. She lived over the few short happy hours of their honeymoon, the haste and confusion of her wedding, the strange coincidence which had brought Victoria Belford eastward on their wedding journey. With this memory came a pang of regret, jealousy. "One of Robert's dearest friends," she repeated to herself. "He couldn't possibly— Oh no—" The thought of her disloyalty in suspecting her husband of any further intrigue with the lovely Victoria sent the color flaming to her cheeks. She further assured herself by the recollection of Mrs. Belford's purpose in hurrying to New York.

At Liverpool her keenest anxiety was softened by a cable from Halifax. "Courage, beloved," it read; "detained by accident. Will explain all. Sail to-morrow. Wait for me London, 33 Cambridge Street." It was sent the day after they were to have left together. Robert had started the following day, and, if all went well, he would arrive in London twenty-four hours later than she. Light was at last beginning to shine through the blackness of the preceding week.

The lodgings chosen by Robert were in a quiet part of the town. Violet busied herself



making the dingy London sitting-room as cheerful as possible for Halifax's coming. She arranged photographs and books on the table and mantel; she placed on the desk the few wedding-presents she had been able to bring with her. Over the shining tea-tray which was brought in by the neat English maid she began to revive from the fatigue of her journey and the shock she had suffered. Constant hope of a telegram buoyed up her lagging spirits. She felt the hours of her solitude could now be numbered. Robert was due Thursday at the latest. But Thursday passed, and Friday followed it newsless. Unwilling to leave the house for a moment lest her husband might arrive while she was out, she surrounded herself with newspapers, devouring every item of shipping news. She sent messages at all hours of the day, until her room looked like a country editor's office; the report she sought was not to be found. Late Friday afternoon the maid came in with a fresh heap of printed copy. "The messenger's been everywhere, ma'am," she said; "he says there's no news of the ship. Shall he try elsewhere, please?" Violet responded absently over the top of a Paris edition of the *Herald*, "These will do." She ran through



it, tossed it aside, and opened one of earlier date. Scanning the front page her eyes caught Robert's name among the head-lines, coupled with sentences which stamped themselves in letters of fire on her brain: "Panic in Wall Street. Whyte-Raines suspend. Robert Halifax, the distinguished young lawyer, gambles his last cent. Sails for Europe penniless." She ran on down the column, devouring every detail, re-reading, to make sure that her eyes had not deceived her, until the letters danced before her sight, the paper slipped from her hand, she rose and with frantic rapidity unfastened the light tea-gown which she was wearing and replaced it by a street dress; she smoothed her hair, put on a hat, drew a veil over it, snatched her purse from the table, and sped down Miss Hidden's narrow, dingy stairs.

An hour later the cheerful maid knocked repeatedly at Violet's door; finally, discouraged, she opened and went in to remove the tea things. The floor was a disordered mass of newspapers; there were slippers and gowns tossed about on the sofas and chairs, the fire was out, and the shade of one window was rolled up to the top.



"The American lady must be dinin' out," she commented, nothing in the disorder indicating to her the history of emotion and excitement transpiring. In the feverish haste to get away, to know more, to do something for the man she loved, the husband who had met with every misfortune at a time when fate should have treated him most gloriously, in the tragedy that was driving a young bride to distraction, Miss Hidden's maid saw only the disorderly preparatory toilet of an American lady "dinin' out."

It was night in the street, the jealous London night that claims the city long before the sun has set over the country meadows. Mrs. Halifax ran towards the crossing where she had watched the maid go in search of hansoms for the lodgers. She hailed one and stepped into it.

"Drive as fast as you can," she said, excitedly, "to the shipping office."

"There are 'undreds o' shipping offices, lady," the cabby called down at her through the skylight, "and they're probably hall shut, too, at this hour."

"It's only six o'clock; don't you think something might be open? I want the lines that go to America."

"I'll drive you down if you like, but it ain't no use."

"Are the banks closed, too, do you suppose?"

The cabby chuckled. "The bankers is off amusin' themselves after three o'clock, when they ain't got a whole bank holiday."

"Then take me to some big hotel," she said; "a very big one."

As she drove on through the black streets of London, under the guidance of a hansom cabby, the American girl found herself possessed of a new courage. Since her arrival she had not once left the lodgings at Cambridge Street, held there by the hope of some further news from her husband. All that she now passed was strange and unfamiliar to her; the recurrence of small squares whose dimly lighted houses overlooked a collection of leafless trees was so frequent that she was sure the horse must be making a circle, retracing his steps at every lapse.

In this anxious time, however, something of her father's strength and principles came to her aid. She was able to argue and reason with herself, to look at the situation calmly, and to summon a determination to act as Robert would be proud to have her. They drove



on for what seemed an endless way, with only a rumbling of rubber-tired wheels and the tinkling of a bell to keep tally of distance or whereabouts: finally they emerged upon a river. Night had made its surface a heavy mirror for innumerable lights that were reflected over its broad expanse. Some lay immovable, others flitted swiftly beyond sight under the bridges, some played with the waves, caressing them as they rolled away from the small boats' sides, some lent a sinister air, and others lengthened a day all too short for merrymakers. Violet's heart was beginning to beat in rhythm with the great pulse of London. The horse's hoofs rang out sharply, the hansom sped on. The city's myth which had fled with the crude daylight was now returning in a fine enveloping mist which descended like a magic lens, showing London through the ages of joy and suffering, of turmoil and triumph, of industry and dissipation, of life and death, that make its history. Violet watched with awe; slowly the great mistress of the world revealed herself to the young daughter of a young race; into the heart of this Western child, whose feelings until now had been her sole tradition, came a first message from

the vast accumulated experience of an old civilization.

The hansom stopped suddenly before a brilliantly lighted entrance to a hotel, whose swinging glass doors were kept in perpetual motion by tall, brown-liveried porters. One of them came forward, helped Violet to descend, shouted a number to her cabby, and asked, with a mixture of deference and authority, "Who'd you want to see, lady?"

"I wanted to find out something," she responded, passing in through one of the swinging doors and feeling her timidity augment under the blaze of light in the vestibule. A young man with neatly brushed hair and stiff, rough clothes sat at a desk behind a brass grating. Over the grating, *Bureau of Information* was printed in important letters, and this, together with the impressive air of the young man, suggested that he knew all sorts of indiscreet and mysterious things, which, should he care to divulge them, would mean ruin to certain clients of the hotel. In the bright light, Violet became conscious of her hasty toilet, her hat she was sure tipped to one side, and her hair was loose and untidy. "He must think I'm awfully queer," she reflected, and then, uncertain how her voice

would sound after the long silence of emotion, she asked for news of the *Denver*.

The young man took down an immense ledger, slipped a pen behind his ear, and began sliding a broad forefinger along the margin of the leaves; he turned over one after another. Presently the forefinger stopped; he pulled the pen from behind his ear, and traced the message which he read out to Violet from a newspaper clipping, "The *Denver* sighted by *Teutonic*, four days out broke port propeller, refused aid. Due in Queenstown Saturday night."

Robert was safe. Two days more and she could be with him. "Thank you," she said to the clerk, with as much enthusiasm as though he were personally conducting the *Denver*.

Arrived again at the lodgings, the neat maid looked at her circumspectly, and then disappeared into the back hall, and reappeared with a telegram, which she held out to the first-floor lodger.

It took courage to open it and unfold it. After the misfortunes of the preceding fortnight, the lonely bride was prepared for bad news only. Her eyes sought the signature



first without reading the message. "Father," she spelled out—"father!" and the rest of the black letters she fairly tore from the page in her eagerness to impress them upon a mind whirling with questions and bewilderment and ecstasy. She repeated a hundred times: "Arrive *Etruria* Liverpool Friday night, will be in London early Saturday morning—wait for us, keep up good courage—all well—Grove and Aunt Carrie with us. Fine crossing." Violet could hear the sound of her father's voice reading over the telegram for her mother's approval. How did they know her address? How could they have come over so quickly? They would be there before Robert. How she adored her father! "He's never said 'no' to me in his life," she thought, hugging the telegram, "and I've never wanted him that he hasn't been able to give up everything else for 'his girl.' He's the best father that ever lived."



Chapter XIV

NO NEWS

WHEN the Bagsbys reached Cambridge Street it was dawn — a pale, sickly London dawn, with a few faint pink clouds scurrying away over the chimney-pots before the fog could drug them.

To Violet, after the long, sleepless night of waiting, it seemed that she had become a child again and was being bundled away in a rumbling carriage from school, safe and warm, rolling along she knew not exactly whither; her mind content at the present holiday, the joy of being once more with her own.

Her first questions were for Halifax. Could they tell her news of him, of the ship, of his misfortune? It was Mrs. Bagsby who responded. Bagsby said nothing. "There's not much to tell you; we don't know any more than you do," was her brief reply, followed by a silence, which to Violet's sensitive pride was a stab. It was evident that her

father disapproved; knowing nothing, she could offer no defence. She loved Robert too deeply to hear his conduct questioned.

Bagsby held one of her hands, quietly patting it from time to time, looking wan and anxious. His wife alternated exclamations and embraces. She threw her arms about the girl, recalling her presentiments of the wedding night. She commented with portent upon so many things at once that Bagsby at last remonstrated. "Come, Emmie, dear, you are both excited. You must try to keep quiet until you've had some rest."

"I'm not going to leave my daughter again for some time to come," she insisted, accompanying Violet to the room that had been prepared for her. "I'm too glad to get her back again."

"I want to laugh and cry, both," the girl exclaimed, when she was settled comfortably at last on a divan, her mother close by in an arm-chair.

"You cry as much as you like," was the sympathetic answer. "Nobody'll see you."

For the first hour she enjoyed hearing of the household in Chicago, of Grove's escapades on the steamer, of Aunt Carrie's criticisms; the home news acted as cotton to dull a pain-



"'SHE'S GROWN TEN YEARS OLDER'"



ful ringing in her ears. Its soothing effect could be only temporary, she knew, and when there was a pause, she begged for more. Her mother described their journey; she gave details of all that had happened since their parting. It was evident that her daughter had not seen the newspaper accounts of Robert's reported renewal of his old intimacy, his presence in Victoria's rooms.

"I sha'n't be the first to tell her," her mother reflected inwardly. "Her father can do it if he likes—but I don't believe it, I never have, and she sha'n't find it out from me."

Violet rose from the divan and went over to the window; she looked out on the dull winter London, and, as she stood in the strong daylight, her mother noticed the lines that encircled her eyes, the change in her girlish face. "It's just awful," she thought; "she's grown ten years older."

There was something in the recent hours of loneliness which whetted her loyalty to her parents. Foremost in her feelings was one of love and confidence for the man whose name she bore; at no moment had she doubted him; she was full of tenderness and regret at his anxieties and losses, but while waiting with true eagerness for Halifax to claim his wife,



she rested happy and content that the Bagsbys had claimed their daughter.

"Why, you act," said Mrs. Bagsby, contentedly, "as though you couldn't get enough of my telling about the family."

"How did you know where I was?" the girl queried, only now finding time to put a question which had puzzled her since the arrival of her father's telegram at Cambridge Street.

"Oh, we had a great trouble. Your father's secretary fixed it up somehow; I guess he held the telephone wires pretty much one whole day between New York and Chicago. Finally he got hold of that young Mr. Burden, one of the ushers, you remember him, don't you? Of course we had no communication with Mr. Halifax, as he sailed before we knew *it.*"

It was the first reference that had been made to Robert; pride had kept Violet from speaking, and Mrs. Bagsby had nothing to say of her delinquent son-in-law.

"Does father seem much troubled?" the girl asked, pressing her hands against her forehead and leaning back listlessly against the cushions.

"I don't know as he does," her mother rejoined.



"Robert is almost sure to reach London tomorrow night. I'll have to pack up all my things again and move back to the lodgings; that's where he expects to find me."

The mother made no response. She knew very well her husband's determination; she knew that Violet was to be prevented from returning to Cambridge Street, from seeing her husband there or elsewhere. She knew all the wrath and anger pent up in Bagsby's breast, but she said nothing. Her philosophy, could she have put it in words, would have read, "Peace at any price." The price now was her daughter's ignorance of what most nearly concerned her. Peace was bought, and silence was prolonged. After a while, the young girl resumed her inquiries as to her father's health, "Just as though she suspected something," Mrs. Bagsby reflected; and these inquiries were followed by a timid mention of Robert's probable plans, of his ill-luck and losses, of her intention to economize and help him to get on his feet again.

"You were poor when you started out with father, weren't you?" she asked, warming as she talked of what was nearest her heart.

"Yes." The monosyllable, as Mrs. Bagsby pronounced it, implied that there was a whole



world of difference between honest Bagsby poverty and reckless Halifax pennilessness.

The girl was moving restlessly about the room again.

"You act as nervous as a witch-cat," said her mother.

"I can't stay quiet forever," she answered, putting both arms lovingly about her mother, and kissing the top of her head. "No matter how comfortable it might be, dear mother, I should have to move some time."

"What do you calculate to do?"

"I calculate," she laughed, "to find father and to see Grove again, and perhaps to go out."

"You can do as you've a mind about going out. I'll find your father," she announced, fearing instinctively that some word or look of Bagsby's, spoken when he was alone with his child, might lead to the explanation which she hoped could be postponed until it should no longer be a necessity.

"No, don't go!" she held her mother fast. "I want you with me every minute."

With a pleased and flattered smile, Mrs. Bagsby settled again into the deep arm-chair, sighing: "I don't know what Carrie's doing, and the boy's likely getting into no end of



trouble. At Liverpool people were bowing right and left when we came off the ship—all acquaintances he'd picked up on the ship. If he keeps on this way, we'll know the whole of Europe before we've done with it. We might as well have left that young governess behind," she went on, warming confidingly to the new-found daughter. "She's good enough, but nobody seems to want her. Grovie says he's too old for a governess, and Aunt Carrie's taken a notion she'll see more if she goes around alone."

"Is she looking for an adventure?"

"I don't know as she is. She has 'em without looking for 'em. She was lost in Liverpool for three hours. We missed the train hunting for her. Then, when she turned up, we couldn't for the life of us find her trunk."

"Go on," Violet laughed.

"Oh, there's plenty to tell; things are so queer over here. They're all so slow, it seems as though there was more time than there is in Chicago, and they're always thanking you here, no matter what you say to them." The subject evidently was one which had suggested many comments to her practical mind. "We tried to get the rooms on the first floor, but some Italian duke had them. They say



large families don't travel round much over on this side, and the hotel life isn't nearly as pleasant as it is with us. These *tables d'hôte* are poor affairs. You have to sit right through the whole dinner. At Liverpool I only wanted soup and ice-cream, and they made me wait an hour for it. It's bad management."

Violet gave an indulgent, loving smile to this mother whose observations, tastes, and education were so widely different from her own. She admired the force and balance of her fine, simple nature. The most serious subjects in life had never been discussed between them. Mrs. Bagsby's attitude and the example she set were the only methods she knew of expressing herself. Violet was glad of this. She feared unconsciously that the lack of grace, which was strength in her mother's conduct, might become vulgarity in her conversation. So they passed silently over the passages in life when some mothers have most to say. Religion, the mysteries of birth and death, of these the girl had been allowed to form her own ideas. In moments of embarrassment, when she had appealed to her parents, there had been but one answer: "You know how I feel—now do what you think is best." Added to the character this had de-



veloped, there was a refinement, a sensibility, and penetration in the child which made her bigger than the mother she revered.

Mrs. Bagsby had no imagination. She never cared for poetry. "If a man's got anything to say, let him say it in prose," she often announced, and her husband generally agreed with her. Occasionally, however, Violet had found him with a volume of verses, chanting rhyme to himself on the sly.

"What's the use of imagination?" Mrs. Bagsby asked, when the conversation drifted into abstract matters, and it might have been difficult to define the use it could serve in a Spooneyville education. "I don't care much for dreamers," the capsule merchant acquiesced, but now and then, in a moment of reminiscence, when he spoke of his childhood, of his parents, of some incident that had touched or stirred him, he gave the color of a dream to what he was sure had taken place in the common light of day.

"It makes me restless," Mrs. Bagsby exclaimed, changing from the arm-chair to the sofa, "not being able to rock."

"There must be rocking-chairs in London," her daughter responded, indulgently. "I think I'll find Grove's governess and see if I

can't get something you will be comfortable in."

"Couldn't you take your aunt with you?" the older woman asked. "She'd like so much to go."

"Of course," the girl responded. "I thought she preferred seeing things by herself."

While Violet put on her hat and wraps, Aunt Carrie and Miss Prangle were called.

"It's too late to do much shopping," she apologized to her aunt, when they had greeted each other, "but we can get some air."

"You don't have to go out to get *air*," exclaimed the shivering elderly maiden. "You can sit right here and have more than you want."

In the hall they passed Mr. Bagsby.

"Where are you going?" he asked, putting one hand affectionately on his daughter's shoulder.

"Just for a walk."

"Not going over to those lodgings?" Violet was puzzled at the way he asked this.

"Not now," she said. "Can we do anything for you, father?"

"Yes," he said, slowly; "I don't want you to go over there," and he went on down the hall and disappeared into the drawing-room.



It was the same code whereby she had been brought up. If he had forbidden her to return to Cambridge Street she would have asserted herself. His brief request was forcible; she felt bound to obey. Somebody could go over for her after dinner and see if there were news of the ship.

Bagsby opened the door to find his wife in tears. The dismal hotel apartment, with its dingy walls and tawdry furniture, completed the melancholy picture.

"It's Violet," protested the weeping matron, "I've never seen her so pale. She's a shadow to what she was."

"Come, mother," he said, putting his arm around her, "this is not the time for crying. It isn't going to help."

"I suppose not," she sniffed, "but it don't seem as though I could help much, anyway."

"Yes, you can; it 'll take a lot of strength, too. We've never refused the girl anything. I don't intend now she shall go back to that man. Do you think, Emmie, dear, I could hold out alone without you to back me up? It 'd be the first time."

"Is there any news of the ship?" she asked, responding to her flattering official position



as chief aid by the most business-like question she could think of.

"The ship's due to-morrow. The passengers 'll be up to London in the evening. Violet's likely got telegrams at Cambridge Street."

"You wouldn't keep them from her, would you?"

"I don't know as I would," he answered, evasively, and Emmeline knew that questions were not the order of the day. There was a pause.

"Oh, by the way, guess who's staying in the hotel?"

"An Italian duke?" Mrs. Bagsby ventured.

"No—some one we know."

"Business or social?"

"Social."

"One of your friends or one of the children's?"

"Children's," Bagsby puffed, lighting a cigar as he made his laconic replies.

"It can't be a friend of them both."

"It is, though."

"Not," she cried, with the enthusiasm of one far from home, "not Mr. Patterfield West!"

"The same," Bagsby chuckled, taking a long puff while he slipped both thumbs through his suspenders where they came near the arm-



holes of his waistcoat. "The same," he repeated, his eyes twinkling as though he had made and imported a new brand of friends especially for Americans travelling abroad.

"Well, I declare! How'd he get here?"

"Swam, I suppose."

"Oh, pshaw, Camden," said his wife. "What line did he come on? He must have been at sea the same time we were. Did he have bad weather? Why didn't you ask him up?"

Camden had noticed that no matter how much information he might obtain from the friends he chanced to meet when alone, it was always as though he had found out nothing when the women of his family began to question him.

"I didn't think to inquire what sort of a passage he had. He looked well and said he was busy. He hadn't much information about the market, but he seemed eager for news of you ladies. Violet, in particular. He's a fine young fellow." Patterfield was benefiting in the manufacturer's mind along with everything else American by comparison with English surroundings. The halo cast over "home produce" was large enough to fill "P. W." with a flattering glow.

"I can't see why you didn't ask him up."



"I was so flustered at seeing a familiar face. I felt the whole place must be his, somehow. I guess he 'll be along up after dinner."

"Well, well," Mrs. Bagsby murmured contentedly, "to think of meeting Mr. West. Why, it's like old times in Chicago."

Chapter XV

VIOLET'S LONDON ADDRESS

HALIFAX'S steamer was slow, and its speed not accelerated by a broken shaft, snapped about five days out. They were towed, therefore, towards British shores slowly if safely, and one man on board chafed from morning until night. He had wired his wife from Queenstown, and was surprised to receive no telegram from her, but argued that she was strange to the different ways of communication. He had not permitted himself to wonder whether or not she had seen any European reports of the New York papers, or what might have been cabled to her from New York. He couldn't let himself dream what effect it would produce, coupled, doubtless, with West's information of the meeting at the Astoria.

On his arrival at Waterloo there was nothing to be seen but fog, a gigantic garment, thick, yellow, that enfolded its impenetrable envelope



over the city. When Halifax stepped out of his train he emerged into a kind of pandemonium. All the traffic for the time being was stopped. He crawled out of the gloomy station into the mysterious streets, leaving his luggage to be brought along when fetching and carrying were again resumed. He stood irresolutely looking (not to right or left, for there were none), into the sloughing, drifting, gray and yellow atmosphere, through which he literally couldn't see his hand before his face. A horse's nose loomed directly up in front of him. Halifax "hallooed" and leaped aside, and the horse came bodily out of the fog from an invisible somewhere; a cabby growled down at him: "Look out, will yer? Mind yer bloody way, will yer?"

"Could you get me to the Savoy?" cried Halifax. The Savoy was close at hand, and it was thither his way should have lain with his wife a few days earlier in their luckless honeymoon. "I'll take my bearings from there," thought the traveller.

"I couldn't get to it, if it was 'eaven, and the fare a pound," was the cabby's answer. "I'm not going to budge."

On every side resounded the deep calls and sharp, quick cries of those who forced a way



in spite of hindrances, calling "'Ware!" to the others. Halifax joined the adventurers. He put up his arm as though to shield his head and keep free from the choking, sickening mist. The hotel was within a ten minutes' walk, and he went slowly forward, keeping, as he supposed, to the left. Several times he found himself clasped in the arms of a groper like himself, and every time, as he unclasped, he asked his direction anew.

He at length reached Waterloo Bridge, and close to the railing he made his snail's pace forward. Here a singular coincidence befell him. He collided again with a human obstacle, and a man dismantled from the fog, more distinctly than the others had done.

"Where's the Savoy Hotel?" asked Halifax.

"Right here, sir. I'm one of the porters, sir, just goin' to Waterloo." He was in livery, and his hat-band bore, as clearly as it could, witness to his profession.

Robert had a "Rock-me-to-Sleep-Mother" feeling as he relinquished the valise he had kept. "I'll give that chap a big fee," he thought; and then he remembered, as he was always remembering of late, that he was as poor as Job's turkey, and that every cent he had was borrowed.



At the Savoy letters and telegrams awaited him. He ran eagerly through cables from Aunt Lydia and Burden, and, among others, one from Victoria Belford. This last he crumpled in his hand with a low exclamation.

"I want to go to Cambridge Street at once," he said to the polite clerk.

"I'm afraid you won't be getting there to-night, sir. You'll not find a cab to take you, and the buses are off, I understand."

And here Robert frankly swore against the atmosphere, against the street systems, and, above all, at Fate.

"It is a nasty night, sir," acquiesced the other, in impersonal sympathy. "Quite the nastiest in years; nothing like it that I remember."

"Oh, you can be sure of that!" the unfortunate man agreed. "You can set that down as fact! If it could have been worse it would!"

He made for the exit, and the porter who had guided his steps from the bridge met him in the court, and took a more brotherly interest in him. "Not going hout, sir?"

"Yes, I'm going to get to Cambridge Street."

"You'll never, sir; it's 'ardly safe, too; there's footpads what makes a regular 'arvest



hout of the fog nights; to do it you'd be taking good three hours—"

Added to the fog was a bitter, insinuating cold that made the wretched without peculiarly to be shunned.

"It may lift, sir, arfter dinner."

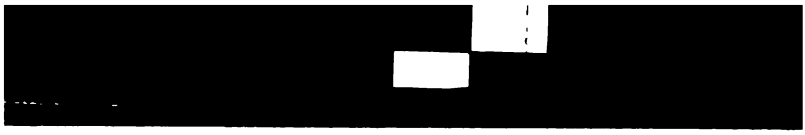
"My good friend"—Halifax peered from comfort and housing and light into the impalpable screen, all that was now between him and his wife—"my good friend, I'm going to make for Cambridge Street if I carry a lighthouse and blow a fog-horn."

And at half-past ten he knocked at the door of No. 33, his heart beating like a boy's, his breath fairly frozen. He rang and rang and rang, and knocked and knocked; at length a latch was drawn and the door-handle turned in welcome grasp.

"Who is it, please?" asked a distinctly not American voice.

"Mr. Halifax—Halifax, of Chicago—Mrs. Halifax's husband," he answered, piling his credentials one on the other in lightning succession. A pause ensued, the voice uncompromisingly offered:

"Oh!" and the door opened just wide enough for the outsider to slip within. Evidently with intention to preserve incognito, the owner of the



voice stood as much as possible behind the door's shelter. But the visitor perceived a stout person clad in a flannel dressing-gown, her face done up in a toothache bandage.

"Mrs. Robert Halifax," he repeated—"she's in?"

But the landlady had no welcome for him.

"No," she said, shortly, "the first-floor lady's went."

"Gone!" he substituted. "Where to, pray, and when? What is the address?"

The landlady gazed at the well-appearing late caller, the pretended American husband, in his long light coat; he was pale, nervous, and "fagged lookin'."

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," she replied, evenly; "I've no idea."

"You don't know *what?*" he demanded, sharply, at patience's end and keen with disappointment. "You don't know *where* she went?"

"She went this morning with her parents, I expect—a gentleman and lady in a four-wheeler."

Halifax grew cold. "A gentleman with a gray beard and blue eyes," he eagerly aided her on—"a large man and a very large elderly lady—her father and mother?"



"I expect so, sir," said the woman. "She called them that."

Halifax might be relieved; the landlady was now the more determined on mystery. She grew more gloomy and more withdrawing.

"But where," he persisted, "did they go? To which hotel?"

"They didn't leave an address."

"But the letters and telegrams?"

"Her letters are all there," answered the woman.

There, on a small table's top, under the gaslight, he saw two telegrams of which he possessed himself—his wires, both of them! Halifax thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a gold piece.

"My good madam," he said, wondering what a London landlady would choose as an appellation, and willing to employ it were it "*Altesse*" or "*R. H.*" "My good madam—"

But she froze him at his start. "It's twenty to twelve," she said; "I keep lodgings for ladies only, please. I feel a bad draught, too, and with a bad tooth I'm afraid I'll have to ask you not to wait." And she actually opened the door. But Halifax put his hand on the jamb and firmly closed it. He added another gold piece.



"I am sorry to inconvenience you. I have cards, letters, and checks in my wallet to establish my identity if you like, but I want my wife's address. If you know it or have it, I'll make it worth your while to tell me."

The landlady looked resolutely past the chinking hand of the unknown visitor, and her fingers found the door-knob, which she turned once more; through the inhospitable crack the piercing cold forced its insistent way. "I've *told* you I don't know where the lady's gone. Those," she said, reflectively, "who don't leave addresses are not so apt to be followed."

As she snapped and locked the door on the finally retreating gentleman, she relaxed her sour features into a smile, whose expanse she controlled with one hand that clutched the bandage about her face.

In his apartments in —— Chambers, Algernon Hardcastle was whiling away the last quarter of an hour before he should be ready to retire. Despite a tight market and profound anxiety regarding the financial venture of his life; despite beastly weather, he was in good spirits. He had dined out, been to part of a play, and, still in his overcoat, his white gloves sticking out of his pock-



et, he sat on the piano-stool lightly fingering the air of the operetta from which he had just torn himself away, and humming the treble in an agreeable undertone. Between bars he was thinking of a man whose arrival from the States he had been waiting for days—an American with whom years before he had ranched in the far American West. He wondered why the deuce he didn't hear from the *Denver*, for the ship was in, and he wondered if his friend had married a pretty girl. He was following his memories with a stir of genuine affection—the two had been great chums in the past—when the door was knocked upon and opened; Hardcastle sprang up to give Robert Halifax as open-armed a greeting as a reserved Briton, unfeignedly glad to see a good friend, can extend.

"Look here, by Jove! Halifax, you *have* kept us waitin'."

Halifax referred to his delayed steamer, adding, "I missed one boat."

"Oh, I know, I know, my dear chap. Of course we waited—I mean to say, what could we do else? The prerogative of a great man—he comes when he likes, you see."

The new-comer sat down on a sofa in the light and warmth of the cheerful room. He

put his hat beside him and his gloves on it, and Hardcastle scrutinized him elaborately through his single eye-glass.

"I knew you'd broken a shaft, but from your general appearance I should say you'd been in a total wreck."

"I have," Halifax briefly informed.

"You don't mean to say"—Hardcastle started. "And your wife?"

"My wife," the husband meditated, "appears to have been rescued by a competent life-saving service." Looking up he shrugged and smiled.

"Ah! you're chaffing," illumined Hardcastle, quickly. "Don't expect me to fall into your American humor at the first start, Bobby; but you have gone off—do you know—a lot."

"It isn't surprising, is it?"

"Well, I don't know," returned the other; "marriage is said to be happiness, and happiness ought to keep a man fit."

"Oh, marriage!" exclaimed the bridegroom, and left his exclamation unfinished. "I'm glad, Algy, at all events, that you've kept me in your good books."

"Why not, pray?"

"Then you weren't even rattled by the papers?"



"HARDCASTLE SCRUTINIZED HIM ELABORATELY"



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Hardcastle was blank. "The *papers?*"

"Why, yes, yes. All the nonsense about me—about us, in New York last week."

"My dear fellow," demanded the befogged Englishman, "what are you drivin' at?"

"Do you mean to say you haven't read the papers?"

"Of course I have; naturally the London ones, and they have neither been 'up' nor 'down' on you here. What the deuce have you done—robbed a bank—or did you run away with another man's wife?"

"They say I ran away from my own."

The elder Englishman made a little exclamation, and from his splendid height of six feet four stared at his guest. "Then—ah, Mrs. Halifax"—he stammered.

"Don't you think you might sit down?" suggested the stranger.

"But what will you drink first?"—the host relapsed into hospitality—"and smoke?"

"A cigar, thanks, and I could worry down a sherry cobbler."

Hardcastle took a chair and faced his guest. Americans were so unexpected, so—so "*unusual.*" He crossed his long legs, clasped his hands about his knees, and bent on Halifax his clear blue eyes.



"Go ahead, Bobby."

His ringing confidence did his companion good to hear. "And let me say before you get out a syllable that I don't believe a word, if it's rough on you, whatever it is."

"Thanks," said his guest, and was about to begin his recital when Hardcastle's chambers were invaded once again.

"It's Appleyard—he promised to look in on his way home from the club to see if there were any news of you."

The two men rose to greet Lord Appleyard, chief director and treasurer of the company in whose interests Mr. Halifax had crossed the seas. After the first greetings were exchanged—

"I was just saying something to Hardcastle," the American said. "Perhaps it might be as well for you to hear it, too, if you will."

Ever since the events had transpired which had sent Halifax to Mexico, Appleyard had been a prey to great anxiety. The company of which he was original founder and chief stockholder was on the verge of ruin. The arrival of this American lawyer had been awaited with tense anxiety. Appleyard walked forward rather quickly towards the



two men and shook Halifax cordially by the hand.

"Oh, I dare say you have much to tell us. We have waited for you with great impatience, Mr. Halifax. As you know, we have called a meeting, and you will put before us then, will you not, your investigations?"

But the lawyer's reply was indirect to Grimshorn. "I have been made prominent in New York and Chicago by some very ugly reports in the papers. You have heard nothing?"

Appleyard caught his breath. He had not. He confessed always to a *parti-pris* against American men. Let it be said that he vastly admired the American women he knew, and did not at all wonder that they had chosen to marry his countrymen. Algernon Hardcastle introduced the American element into the British midst, and Appleyard had perused several of the young lawyer's celebrated cases, followed his career from afar, and liked his previous reports to the company.

The nobleman seated himself before the first American man whose dress and appearance answered to his idea of a gentleman.

To the two Halifax repeated the flaring reports that had enlivened the New York papers during the foregoing week.



"By —!" cried Hardcastle, "what a lot of knaves! You're suing, of course?"

"No," replied Halifax, calmly.

"Hem!" coughed Appleyard. "And why?"

"Because there's just enough truth in the whole affair to make my course plain if difficult. I must ignore in silence."

"Awfully annoying," murmured Appleyard. "Most unpleasant. Do you feel"—here he abruptly turned—"that you can give us the explanation you deny to—to—the press —let us say—"

"Yes, I do. I owe it to you and to my wife." And once again, as he had done to Burden, the poor man sketched rapidly before their eyes the dawn of his honeymoon.

"I scorn to explain this," he continued, hotly, "in any polemic whatsoever to a newspaper. I refuse to drag my name or the name of the woman to whom they refer into these vile sheets for explanation. I choose to ignore it publicly," said the American, "and to those who know me it will need no defence."

"Oh, your friends will stand by you, Bobby," said Hardcastle, cheerfully, and before Robert could reply—

"And your wife," asked Appleyard, pene-



tratingly; "Mrs. Halifax is perfectly rational about it?"

"I haven't seen my wife."

"You see, Halifax has only just arrived," explained Hardcastle. "Mrs. Halifax got in before him, you know."

"Perfectly, I understand," waved the other, "but Mrs. Halifax is here with you?" (How profoundly Halifax wished he could truthfully answer in the affirmative!)

"I have no word from my wife, Lord Appleyard. None. Her family have arrived in London; they have seen fit to come to her and to take her with them. She is with her people."

"That," emphasized Appleyard, gloomily, "is very ugly indeed."

"It is very terrible," said the husband, "to realize that I don't know to-night where she is."

"Very, very unpleasant—I mean to say—what"—(and Appleyard's curiosity was too strong for control; it was personal, professional, and human)—"what shall you do, Mr. Halifax?"

"Find her."

"Ah! naturally," mused Appleyard, and relapsed again to silence. Appleyard was deeply involved in the Grimshorn ventures



which had become for London a general speculation of minor importance. Millions of pounds were engaged, and of the gross sum Appleyard's not inconsiderable fortune formed a round golden egg.

"I expect," he said, slowly, breaking the silence, "that these people will hardly begin divorce proceedings at once?"

Halifax sprang from the sofa. "*What?*" he cried. "What?"

The voice in its intensity woke Appleyard to a sense of the personality of his lawyer.

"It *is* nasty," he nodded, "awfully, but I think they'll hardly bother you *here*, Mr. Halifax. Not at least for a few days."

Halifax smiled with curling lips and grimly studied him.

"I see no reason," continued Appleyard, "why Mr. Halifax's private life should affect his professional dealings with us. Indeed, it can't," he hurriedly put in, "it *mustn't*. I am responsible for your introduction in London, however," and he fixedly considered Halifax. "You will meet some of our best-known financiers and some of our best blood. May I ask —may I beg—you will not refer to what you have told us to-day—you understand?"

"I understand," returned Halifax, quietly,



"that you accept me as the lawyer and expert, and not as the man."

Appleyard had race and diplomacy. "Please," he soothed, kindly—"ah, I mean to say, wait a bit. These people have nothing to do with your morals or your reputation. I respect the feeling that induced you to lay the matter before us. *Let it lie there.* If a breath of this is blown to my ears, as I dare say it may be, I shall know how to meet it." He smiled and nodded to the young man. "In order to carry Grimshorn to success, the people who are to hear Mr. Halifax's speech must hear him with at least no preconceived prejudice against him. This you will surely grant me. *We must not give 'em a chance* to think about you as '*man*,' to use your words," smiled the Briton, indulgently.

This was the greeting of London to the ambitious Halifax, before whom until now all ways had been swept clear. He grew paler and paler, and—for he had not reseated himself—walked over to the other side of the room smoking. Hardcastle's hunting clock chimed musically out, midnight—it was the first hour Halifax had marked in England. He counted the strokes now to himself mechanically, the smoke of his weed circling before his eyes.



Appleyard finished his glass of wine and wiped his lips carefully with his handkerchief, and then, his head slightly turned to the man back of him, he said:

"Will you, ah—Mr. Halifax—will you lunch with me to-morrow at the Marlborough Club, at one, please?"

Halifax turned from the midnight chimes and came slowly over to the two.

"I should like you to meet the Marquis of Sparhawk and Sir Alfred Foxharroworth, barrister, you know," continued the peer. He held up to the younger man an aristocratic hand. Halifax touched it and bowed. "For my part, I don't believe the nasty rot," said Appleyard, sincerely, "not a — word of it, and I dare say your wife won't when you've a chance to explain."

It is hard to overcome national prejudices, but Appleyard found that his were more general than individual.

"Bobby," said Hardcastle, "I shall send my man around to the Savoy for your traps at once. You will 'bunk' here, as you used to say in Nevada. I shall go and give the order at once. I've got to go out of town and stay with my family for a fortnight, and the whole place is yours, old man."



Halifax resumed his former seat, and Appleyard, all animation, leaned towards him and put his hand on the knee of Robert Halifax, legal representative of the American interest.

"You see, Rearing Brothers' failure has surfeited the markets with the first mortgage bonds—that's the present sharp pinch, and there's no general confidence in Grimshorn among the capitalists."

"But if," mused the American, "if confidence can be restored."

"Ah!" nodded Appleyard brightly, "my dear sir! My dear sir!"

They replenished their glasses and relit their respective pipes and cigars, and talked Grimshorn until the sickly day came and sent Lord Appleyard home and the others to bed.

At the close of Monday, Halifax had used every means in his power to discover the whereabouts of one too evidently taking no pains to discover him. A pretty general circuit among the hotels and banks threw no light on the mystery, and he now waited with growing impatience for an answer from cables sent to Chicago, asking for Camden Bagsby's address.

By the afternoon his tour had brought him before Westminster, just as the bells were



ringing out for vespers, and, strongly impelled, he entered the abbey with a few sightseers and worshippers. At the back of the cathedral, while the organ pealed forth a far-away musical chant, he stood quietly for a few moments, but he was obliged to confess that there was no peace for him here. He turned, therefore, towards the Poets' Corner, and paused again after a step or two, to observe a very small boy, not a sleek Eton schoolboy, but a wiry little American in pea-jacket and derby. The child wandered about in the shadows, a bunch of violets in his hand, looking up at the immense vaulted arch, at the names carved on the walls. After a bit his eyes apparently fell upon the object of his search, for he came to a standstill by a certain tomb, gave a quick glance to see if he were unnoticed, and bent to read the inscription. Halifax, through the dusk between them, saw that the child placed something on the tablet, and then turned quickly to leave the church, with no steady, hushed tread, but a brisk, forward march, his boots clattering on the marble.

Deeply interested, Halifax approached the spot. It was the tomb of Dickens, well known to his lovers; upon it lay the bunch of violets



and a slip of paper, whereon was transcribed, in the majestic script of a child of seven: "*To my favrite Auther Charles Dickens, with a litel boy's love.*"

Brusquely Halifax looked up through a mist that deepened the cathedral's dusk. "Nice little chap," he murmured.

The nice little chap had reached the door and turned full around for a last look at his Mecca. Halifax made a wild dash for him, rushing from Westminster Abbey in indecent haste. The boy and himself were both without when the child was caught up in his arms.

"Grove! Grove! My dear boy!"

"Oh, say," struggled the sentimental giver of laurels to the Kings of Literature, "say, brother Robert, let a feller down!"

Robert complied, but held the precious clew tightly by the hand. Grove stared at him frankly as ever, and as impersonally. "The family," he said, "have soured on you." And Halifax started at the words. (This baby knows and takes his part with the world.) "And you, old fellow?"

"Oh, I do' know," was the non-committal reply.

"And Violet?" but Halifax suppressed this question, and made a determined way towards

the sidewalk's curb. *En route*, of a sudden, the little brother-in-law stood stock-still.

"Say, where 're we goin'?" he demanded.

"Why, I ought to ask you," laughed Halifax. "How did you get here?"

"Oh, I've got a carriage," said the little boy, like a lord.

"Well, you give the driver the address, then, Grove."

The child looked at him keenly. "Yours? I don't know it."

"Yours," replied Halifax.

Grosvenor Bagsby had red hair, and was, in consequence of some peculiar curse that attends the favored possessors of this glorious head covering, properly adorned with freckles; at this juncture they were first blotted out by a wave of color that dyed the little face, then every freckle stood out with dark distinctness as the child grew pale.

"No. 2 St. Martin's Lane," he called out.

"Why, that's a bank!" reflected Halifax. "You don't live in a bank."

"It's the only other number I know in England," said the little voice, "and I ain't goin' to give the right one, you bet your life."

Halifax gave the address of Hardcastle's



chambers for want of a better, and seated himself beside this escaping clew.

"How did you know about Dickens's tomb?"

"Vi took me yesterday."

(Violet in Westminster! and yesterday! Why, oh, Fate, not this day?)

"It was a charming idea of yours, Grove, to put those flowers there."

"Wasn't mine," he disclaimed; "it was a fellow's named Harte's."

"Harte's idea?"

"Yep! Bret's his other name—Bret Harte!"

"Where on earth did you know him?"

"Know him!" The boy was scornful. "I don't know him, Brother Robert. I say a piece in school."

("Ah," murmured his friend, "'Dickens in Camp.'")

"Yep, and when it says:

> "'And on the grave where English oak and holly
> And laurel wreathes entwine,
> Deem it not all a too presumptuous thing—
> This spray of Western pine.'

Only I couldn't find the spray of Western pine, so I brought those."

"How do you happen to be out alone in this strange place?"



"Why, I just slipped my *governurse,*" he grinned. "Shook her, Miss Prangle—Pringle-Prangle, I call her."

"Prangle! I don't know her."

"Nope — that's so — she's since — " He stopped.

"Well, dear boy, 'since' what?"

"W'y, since we had to come, you know."

And Halifax was cut deep. "Had to come." Then they crossed the ocean to find her, to protect her and take her away from him. He had an understanding of a child's nature. There was between the two a bond, and he chose to carefully approach the boy. He put one of his hands over the child's. "Grove," he said, confidentially, "I am going to speak to you just as if you were a man. Shall I?"

Grove straightaway sat up an inch. "All right!"

"There has been a terrible misunderstanding all around. Your sister is my wife, and I love her, and I haven't had a chance to explain matters to her. I want to see her, and until I met you just now I have had no way to find out where she is. You can take me to her. Will you? Will you take me now, at once—come, old fellow, where shall we drive?"



Here he waited, considerately looking out at fog and night rather than at his companion. "It's getting late," he said at length, with a change of voice, "and you ought to go home, old man—they'll worry about you, I'm afraid."

There was no response at once; then one came in a smothered tone:

"'Tain't square; I don't believe it's fair."

"Why, my dear boy?"

"I do' know."

And with this subtle reasoning on a point of honor, Halifax was not one to quibble.

They had stopped before the door of Hardcastle's apartments.

"I am treating you like a man, Grove; I am going to get out and send you home alone. I can't keep you out a moment longer, and I wouldn't ask you to do anything you thought wasn't square."

The little boy sat in his corner of the vehicle looking very small and miserable indeed. His eyes were brimful and his lips were twitching. Halifax was on the pavement, smiling at him with gentle comprehension.

Grove scrambled forward and peered up at the building and at the number.

"That," nodded Halifax in answer, "is

where I'm living for the present, Carlton Chambers."

The child put out one scrubby little hand, diminutive in its glove, and laid it in the man's palm. "Say," he managed to get out, "I'd just as lief go with you, Brother Robert, and live with you."

"Don't cry," soothed Halifax, "you're a brick—and will you give Violet my love—my dearest love—can you do that?"

"Yep," nodded tears, freckles, and red hair, and then he cheered wonderfully. "Say, she ain't there, anyway—not at the hotel; you could not see her now—they're all out, an' I'm going to have m' dinner alone."

"Well, jump on the seat and tell the man where you want to go."

Robert took the man's number. "Go carefully, mind." He gave the man a double fare. "Do you understand?" The man understood and knuckled.

Grosvenor Bagsby stood on the seat and whispered upward through the small lid his sacred address. Halifax had already motioned up another hansom, and at the moment Hardcastle's valet appeared suddenly on the scene from the dim court-yard; he held out two envelopes—one a cable—Rob-



ert tore it open — the other a note from the Savoy, full of magic street names and numbers.

"The messenger has found that Mr. Camden G. Bagsby is stopping," etc., etc.

Grove, who had been whirled about and rolled away, was waving adieu with his expressive hand. The engulfing mist was just about to swallow up his vehicle as Robert sprang into his.

"Scott's Hotel, Russell Square," and he stuffed the envelope in his pocket. "And this *embarras de richesse* has saved me from playing quite the lowest trick in love or war, for otherwise I should certainly have *had* to follow my brother-in-law!"



Chapter XVI

BAGSBY TAKES HIS DAUGHTER BACK

AND Violet was at last summoned to the drawing-room. Robert was there; he had come. But without the closed doors she paused, not to collect herself, but from a sense of great, strange fear. That voice she so distinctly heard was not Robert's. It was her father's, a voice of rage, fury, concentrated dislike, wrath, a voice of contempt. She held her breath and heard, not words, but portent. Then she opened wide the door and went into a room, lit as usual, but appearing to her a hideous, strange, four-walled place, set apart in the world for scenes of suffocating misery. She walked on feet that had no volition; the figures in the room slowly came out of the light. She had been sitting alone an hour in the dark, and the halls were dim. Her mother sat in a chair near to the table. She seemed a stranger. On the opposite side of the room she saw Robert standing, a tall, rigid



figure, and his voice, in which she failed to recognize any familiar tone, was asking: "What does Violet say to this?" Her father, who had stopped in his walk to and fro, bent his eyes upon her. In him there was no change. She looked from father to husband, dazed, bewildered. The exclamation of endearment which had risen to her lips, coupled with her husband's name, was frozen by Robert's voice and the sight of his pale, haggard face, as he put this question, "What does Violet say to this?"

"Violet hasn't said anything yet," Bagsby answered. "She hasn't had a chance. We've kept the miserable story from her as long as we could, but when she knows it, there's only one thing she *can* say." He was trying as he talked to lead the bewildered girl towards a chair near where her mother sat, but Violet rebelled, drawing away from this abusive father.

"Know what?" she cried. "What is it—can't some one tell me? Father!"—and then her voice softening, she turned to her husband, with both hands outstretched.

"Robert!" Something in his attitude held her immovable; she could not go to him; and, with a sudden impulse, she kneeled by



her mother's side, and took Mrs. Bagsby's hands convulsively in hers.

"Mother, tell me what has happened."

Before Mrs. Bagsby could answer, Robert's voice sounded clear and sharp:

"Your father accuses me—"

Bagsby interrupted fiercely: "It's no accusation of mine. It's the bald, ugly truth!" And the accused merely lifted his shoulders, and, growing slightly paler, waited in silence for the storm to finish its work of destruction.

"This man here"—Bagsby addressed himself to his daughter, who still remained close to her mother's side—"this man here has been unfaithful to you on your very wedding-day, before your honeymoon had even begun."

"That's a lie." Halifax's low voice was a threat.

The girl sprang up, but Bagsby, heedless of her, went on more and more excitedly:

"It was no accident that kept him from sailing with his wife—it was an intrigue, an intrigue with a married woman, a woman he has loved for years, a woman he loves now, a woman he's going to keep on loving. He can't get away from her," the old man fairly screamed. "She kept him from sailing with his wife!"

Mrs. Bagsby wrung her hands, murmuring from time to time, with a flutter of her handkerchief, "Oh, Camden, don't! don't! Camden, Camden!"

This dissuasive attempt acted as a spur to goad on the furious father.

"She kept him from sailing with you, I say, and now she can keep him forever. She's spoiled enough happiness with her scheming. She sha'n't spoil any more!"

The young wife shrank slowly away, as though to withdraw farther at each new revelation. Her head bowed, her eyes lowered, her breath coming short and quick, one hand rested on the table to steady her and the other fluttered between her forehead and her heart, in the endeavor to calm her agitation, to assure herself that there would be an awakening from this ugly dream. But the lines in Bagsby's face marked the intensity of reality.

"I was generous with this young fellow," he cried, pointing to Halifax, whose increasing pallor showed the control he was exercising not to silence his accuser by force. "I gave him the best I had in the world. I thought he was worthy. It's been the mistake of my life. He's betrayed the most precious trust a man can take upon himself. He's renounced



his claims. I've doubled mine. The girl's my daughter so long as I am able to be a father to her, and I guess that'll be about as long as my life lasts!"

Mrs. Bagsby had ceased to agitate her handkerchief. It lay now over her face, the recipient of tears which she could no longer control.

"I take my daughter back," the manufacturer cried, with emphasis which defied contradiction.

"Father," the girl murmured, moving towards him, and, in the strong desire of youth, backing her will against fate, "there must be some mistake."

Halifax instinctively started forward towards this lovely wife, who, in the face of her father's accusations, still believed that there must be a mistake.

"Violet," he breathed, "my wife—"

Bagsby stood between them. "I forbid you to use that name," he said, with as near approach to an oath as he had ever come.

"Mistake?" he asked, taking up Violet's question. "Mistake? This man was found in Mrs. Victoria Belford's rooms at the hour when his bride was sailing for Europe. There is no mistake."

The sound of this name brought a personal



image before the girl's eyes. She had endured a vague jealousy of "some woman," but this sudden apparition of the beautiful, radiant Victoria, "one of Robert's best friends," the companion of their journey from Chicago on their wedding-night, this warm, lovely, living reality suffocated Robert's wife.

"Oh," she repeated, "how dreadful, how dreadful!" and her words froze the blood in her husband's veins. She was slipping away from him; the tide of her father's anger was carrying her beyond reach; the flood of jealousy opened in her heart was drowning her love of her husband, for whom a moment before she had plead. Bagsby's features relaxed as those of the combatant who has gained ground. Truth was his most eloquent advocate. Letting it now speak for him, he paced back and forth. With the rapid mental flashes which in moments of emotion bring a lifetime into appalling relief, Violet reviewed the past four weeks. In the full light stood her father; no search could discover a flaw in his devotion and tenderness. Her heart grew big as she thought of them. In the shadow, where unfamiliarity placed him, was the lover, the new-made husband. How faulty, how faithless, he appeared! Her



heart contracted. It seemed to cry out for pity. Robert waited meanwhile, an expression of tenderness and yearning on his haggard face, which spoke the love he dared not utter. Surely she would give him a chance to explain—better yet, perhaps she would turn to him impulsively, as she had done many times, placing her hands in his with the trust which was all he asked. "She loves me," he thought, "of that I am convinced. She must have faith in me."

Here Mrs. Bagsby struggled up from the deep chair where she had been weeping. Her slow decision to speak had calmed her tears and steadied her voice.

"I can't let things go on and say nothing when I feel as I do. I haven't ever believed the story, and I'm not going to now. It'll be cleared up. I don't know how, but there's something in me that refuses to take it as you do, Camden."

"God bless her!" Robert muttered under his breath.

To Violet the short appeal from her mother promised release; but before Mrs. Bagsby could say more, the stern accuser had turned upon his victim.

"There's no clearer justice," he began,

stopping short in his measured tread and thrusting both hands slowly into the depths of his trousers pockets, "nothing fairer than letting a man speak for himself. I've made certain statements, accusations you can call them if you like. Can you refute them?" he asked, tilting back on his heels, as though to send his penetrating glance with more force into the guilty one's soul. "Can you deny that you were in Mrs. Belford's room when you should have been on your way to the steamer?"

There was a breathless pause. Mrs. Bagsby's face already wore a smiling "I told you so." Violet leaned eagerly forward; an arm's length only separated her from the man she loved. His answer would determine what distance was measured by the short space between them. The warm loveliness of her expression prolonged the silence which Robert would not break.

"Well?" Bagsby queried, "can you deny what I say?"

"No," was the answer, "I cannot altogether deny what you say, but—"

"No buts!" cried the father-in-law, resuming his walk up and down the room. "You can't deny? There's not much more to be said, then—"



Halifax's voice rang out angrily. "There is a great deal to be said. There is everything to be said. It is an outrageous slander. I can explain the whole matter if you will listen to me."

Bagsby shook his hand in the air. "There's no use wasting words. You might *say* a lot, but you couldn't explain what you can't deny."

"By Heaven!" cried the younger man, "you shall listen to my side of the story! Is a man to be condemned without a hearing?"

"You've had yours," Bagsby interrupted. "You plead guilty from the start. There's nothing more you can add that I want to hear. Your sentence has been pronounced. I take my daughter back!"

"But Violet?" Her husband turned to her, eager, confident. She waited a moment, her body shaken and quivering, and then, without looking up, she shook her head.

"Violet," Robert entreated, "you *must* hear me."

Trembling she rose. The two men, who meant all manhood to her, stood side by side, accuser and accused, waiting her decision. She went straight to her father's arms, her head fell against his broad chest, where she

had found consolation for the troubles of her short life.

Over Halifax's face a mask was folded, a mask of compassion for all the misunderstandings that make the world a miserable hell, a mask of pride, with a touch of scorn about the lips.

"So easy to love," he murmured, "so difficult to trust! I have expected too much."

He went to the chair where his hat and coat lay; he picked them up mechanically and walked over to Mrs. Bagsby, whose helpless hand he lifted to his lips. Then, passing before his hasty judge and the daughter, who had not moved from her father's arms, he bowed with a courtesy which his sense of outrage accentuated, and, opening the door deliberately, he took his leave of the Bagsbys and of his wife.

Bagsby's daughter stood in the dreary hotel room; a cold, inefficient electric light twinkled its pallid lucence from a starved bulb hung aloft in the distant ceiling. Mrs. Robert Halifax leaned against the foot of the bed, her hands in front of her, clasping and unclasping. How she came there she scarcely knew; she had a wild recollection of a girl little like the



Violet Bagsby of old breaking away from her father's arms when the door had really closed upon Robert Halifax. She recalled a passionate protest against the evil said of her husband, a riot against any will that kept her from him; she remembered floods of tears in which she should have wept out her heart, but this panting thing that pained her side now as she breathed could not be a heart; it was a mere machine, continuing to do its work because it couldn't break. She remembered that her mother had tried to comfort her, and for a moment against that loving breast she had indeed been quiet; then her father's voice had ventured again on the old cruel, terrible words, and she had changed from Bagsby's daughter to Robert's wife. What she had said she scarcely dared remember; crimson, terrified, yet convinced, she must have rushed from them, for now she found herself alone.

Around her the dull, ugly room folded its dingy, impersonal seclusion; with a dry sob she stirred mechanically, divested herself of the dress she wore, putting on a pink flannel dressing-jacket of Aunt Carrie's. Her own delicate finery, ordered with delicious mystery and enjoyment in Chicago a few weeks ago, she had not been willing to wear. Each

article she chose for the difficult approval of the man whom she longed to please in every detail, and until he should see the pretty things they should lie unwrapped in their tissue paper. Miss Bagsby's jacket was made for the meagre thinness of spare spinsterhood; the lovely lines of the young girl's figure filled it, swelled it as an opening bud a jealous, too narrow sheath. She went over to the bureau and, picking up her dressing-comb, arranged her disordered hair. Her wedding and engagement rings clicked together as her fingers busied themselves with her hair. The diamond flashed faintly, catching and sending back the light. She could scarcely bear to look at these two circlets, the one diamond-broken, the other clear, bright gold. They were like rings of pain around her heart.

A gentle rap made her start violently from her deeply personal meditation. Miss Prangle, the governess, slipped into the room, begging Mrs. Halifax's pardon, "but poor little Grosvenor hasn't been able to get to sleep yet."

Mrs. Halifax slowly turned to the new incomer and put her dressing-comb down on the mantel-shelf. There existed between the two women a sympathetic bond; they were both



young and charming; the little governess thought Mrs. Halifax the most lovely creature she had ever beheld, and she gazed at her now in awe at this frankly displayed suffering which she did not understand, but which was grief, and aroused compassion.

As for Violet, she restrained her feminine desire to throw her arms about Miss Prangle and to say, "You are a woman, you are kind; help me."

"Grosvenor," continued the governess, in forced commonplaceness, "says he wants to speak to you."

"To speak to me?" the sister echoed. "At this time of night? I hope he isn't sick, is he?" And she followed the emissary down the hallway through the corridors to another part of the suite occupied by the Bagsby family.

During Miss Prangle's absence Grosvenor had amused himself by lighting and extinguishing the electric light by means of a button at his bed's head, so that his sister entered in a moment of darkness to be as quickly illumined by a snap from the little boy's fingers. He was sitting bolt upright in a chaos of bedclothes and tumbled pillows.

"Hel-lo!" he greeted the lovely apparition of his sister.



"'WHAT IS IT, DEAR?'"



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"What's the matter, Grovie? You're not sick, are you?"

"Nope," he shook his red tousle. "Say, come on over here, will you? I want to tell you something."

Miss Prangle discreetly withdrew and shut the door softly, and the sister went over and sat down on the tumbled bed.

The little brother looked at her as keenly as she observed his red cheeks and bright eyes, but he didn't ask what was the matter. He was embarrassed at the sight of this changed Violet—pale, with evidences of tears upon her eyes. He encircled her shoulder with his wiry little arm and drew her head down to him. She had played listener to bedtime confidences before.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, gently.

"Say," his hoarse, childish whisper brought forth, "I saw Brother Robert to-day."

She withdrew from his encircling arm. "What do you mean?"

"Truth and honor, cross my heart," he nodded, like an eager mandarin.

His sister took his hands and held them tight. "Tell me when, tell me everything—quick—quick!" She almost shook him, and he told, hurrying his narrative, spurred on



by her eager attention. His frank, expressive words tumbled one over the other. "Brother Robert, Brother Robert"—how strong and kind the man stood out in the child's story! "*His dearest love!*"—that was the message he had sent her, and by this child's lips—would he have dared, would he have given this word if he had not been loyal to her first of all? And he hadn't been given a chance to explain! Hardcastle, Carlton Chambers, that was where he was staying.

Robert's wife, her eyes dark and profound, sat before the little red-headed child, with lips parted as they moved in unison with his speech. "Say," she heard the small voice insist, high in excitement, "*say*, did I do right not to tell?"

She made a gesture of despair and anguish, displaying a moment of mature suffering whose abandonment childhood is not often given to see. She covered her face with her hands; Grosvenor, scarcely less agitated, touched her cheek with cold fingers.

"Why don't Prangle go out and get Brother Robert?" he suggested. "If you're not mad at him, why *don't* she?"

"Hush!" said his sister, "Brother Robert has been here. He found out some way; I've seen him."

The small brother stared. "You have?" This was "getting big," as he apostrophized to himself everything that was out of his pale of understanding. He fell back a little, settling down into his mountain of blankets and sheets. "Oh," he said, meditatively, "so I guess it's all right."

His sister had forgotten him; she sat forward and leaned her elbow on her knee, her head on her hands, and stared straight in front of her. Grosvenor's diminutive clothes were on the chair at which she gazed; his trousers, shirt-waist, little stockings, all neatly laid out. And for the child, all the subtle, anxious questions were answered. He felt he had given the whole responsibility over to some one who could care for it. A relief, a comforting drowsiness crept over him; he curled up close to Mrs. Halifax, she felt his little hand on her knee, but she sat for only a few short moments inert, then rose quickly, bent over the boy and kissed him.

"Good-night; be still and go to sleep now, like a good boy; I'm going to speak to Miss Prangle."

Chapter XVII

MIDNIGHT IN HARDCASTLE'S CHAMBERS

HALIFAX, mounting the stairs leading to his chambers, scarcely saw the steps of his ascent. He threw open the door of his bachelor rooms and entered in a passion of rage against fate in general and against his father-in-law in person. Before him was the task of preparation for the morrow's meeting of the Grimshorn directors. From his exhaustive notes he had already organized the argument, and it remained only to put the matter in proper shape for presentation. It was the question of a few uninterrupted hours' labor, to which the retirement of his apartment invited.

But that well-trained instrument, his mind, accustomed to respond instantly at command, was a machine gone mad, a whirring, twisting set of wheels and trembling wires. He looked within upon a disarray from which he despaired of bringing forth peace or order. He

divested himself of his overcoat and began to stride about the room. It was no difficult matter to reconstruct for his pitiful, angry mental scrutiny the scene he had just left, and Halifax, so lately a chief actor in the play, studied the short tragedy, a spectator, as it were, from his stall, back in shadows.

He marvelled that the calm accused had not swept away with disdainful force the defaming Bagsby. His sense of the injustice of the reception, entertainment, and dismissal was so great that it turned to bitterness his very love for the wife whose image insistently forced itself upon his burning eyes.

This young wife, exquisite in her simple dress, stood out so fine and clear that the father and the pitying mother faded palely. Robert regarded Violet as she stood by her father, frail, slight, with bowed golden head, her eyes sweet with tenderness and strange with disapproval. Was there any love for him in the face of his wife? Ah, on her lips, parted as though to speak to him! And he half believed that, had she dared to remove the seal, those lips would have called him to stay, would have bid him return!

"Return? Never!" he cried aloud, and a hot sentiment of wounded pride and hurt love



made him despise Bagsby. He was disgusted with the angry clamor against his perfectly innocent name; when, just here, keen justice veered a little. For the figure of Camden Bagsby moved not from its defence; it grew slowly out of the indistinctness and challenged the son-in-law anew.

The question of finance had not been broached, but the fact remained in its mortifying baldness that the husband who had magnificently refused the generous marriage settlements, offered now to his wife a foreground of poverty and a background of debt.

Halifax knew the mettle of the self-made Westerner too well to linger a moment on this clause. He passed to the only real point, and in spite of himself, against himself, he pleaded with the furious old gentleman. Victoria! If the world at kindest winked and shrugged, if difficult to clear in the eyes of a varied public, how harder far to explain to this father in whose sight the garden of happiness lately opened to Violet by her husband had become a den of wolves.

He paced up and down the unfamiliar room of the barrister. What strange scenes he could have revealed to the phlegmatic eyes of Hardcastle's photographed friends! He took

a cigarette and lighted it, shook the match back and forth long after it was out, and then threw it into the fire. The strain of the last few hours, the rapid succession of emotions through which he had passed, had used up the sensational, human Halifax, and left an introspective, sceptical Halifax.

"There must be some end to what a man can suffer," he thought, "and I should fancy I had about reached the limit."

The first cigarette followed the match, and absently he lighted another and sat down in one of Hardcastle's impersonal leather chairs.

"I'm a deuced failure," he concluded, after puffing a while. "Success is a kind of belladonna Fate drops in one's eyes to make one look brilliant and blind one at the same moment. I wonder what sort of a biography mine would be? 'Robert Halifax: the cases he won, the men he knew, the women he loved,' and then, in a second volume, the reverse side of the medal: 'Robert Halifax—the cases he lost, the men who knew him, and the woman who—'" He stopped short. "Bah!"

Outside the wind was blowing furiously, the windows rattled. He rose, drew the curtains, and came back to the fire. From the mantel-piece he lifted the Grimshorn portfolio.



The crisp paper rolled under his fingers, and he scanned the closely written pages with satisfaction. "I had half expected," he smiled to himself, "to find my documents turned into nursery rhymes; this was a little oversight on the part of Fate. There's a good three hours' writing yet to be done, thank God! 'On such a night,'" he quoted, turning over the volumes of items and figures. He looked at his watch: "Twenty to twelve; hours before me; blessed be work; if the subject were not so trite I should begin now with an eulogy on labor. There is actually enough of that to go round. It is not everybody even that can fail. There is a mystery about failure; it implies the presence of a certain fairy in the earliest cradle days; but work—there's plenty for us all—no deception—no coquetry—no impatience —the same old task waits immovable until you get it done. And now, let's be at it!" He pulled a table out from the wall, placed a lamp on it, moved over the inkstand, pens, and blotters from the desk in the corner, stirred up the fire, threw more coal over it, spread the Grimshorn report out carefully before him, drew up a chair and seated himself.

It took time to choose among Hardcastle's assortment of pens one which exactly suited,

and when he had tried it on experimental sheets of paper, he read back to resume the thread of his argument. It was as clear as a bell, this statement made when the affair was freshly stamped upon his mind. But, as he read, in spite of his attention for Grimshorn, his eyes wandered from the lines to the fire. Where had he seen a soft-coal fire like it? "In the Bagsbys' library," he answered himself, "the day we first talked about coming to London," and, with the subdued chirruping of the red coals, Violet's voice sounded again, repeating her promise to go with him wherever he went. "I love you, Robert," it whispered.

"Bah!" he shook himself. "I shall be the first to disprove my own claims about work." Following statistics and figures with his pen, he read on down the page, stopping presently in the middle of a column.

"She hadn't a thing to say—not a word, not a look, even. She believed the worst of me; she believed that I— Great heavens, what a strange sort of love!"

Picking up the half-dead cigarette from the table's edge where it lay, and puffing it into a glow, he determinedly reverted to the work. "The returns for '87—here's the gist of the whole matter. How could they have been



such fools as to pass this over? It was uncommonly lucky for me they did, as otherwise —otherwise — otherwise—" His mind wandered. "Why, she doesn't trust me, she doesn't trust me; I'm the poorest devil in London—no sort of a portion to offer a woman; but she is—or she was—my wife." He remembered her own expression, "What is the use of my saying anything as long as you don't trust me?" and with this phrase came a host of accusing thoughts. It was in connection with the letter signed "P. W." that she had made the first claim upon him, and had he not trusted her then, and afterwards, too? The flowers at the Waldorf, Patterfield West's mysterious appearance on the ship, all these had he not forgiven because of his faith in Violet?

Robert's nature, tender and generous in success, was hard and scornful under criticism. His aunt, Miss Halifax, had often commented on his difference in this to other children: "There was no way of punishing him when he was little, for he stopped wanting a thing as soon as he knew you wouldn't let him have it. If I forbade him sweetmeats for three days, he wouldn't touch them on the fourth, or ever again." He looked back now on his



childish force and wished that he might apply it on a gigantic scale. "I don't blame Bagsby," he thought; "he's convinced I'm a cad. His conduct is certainly consistent. But—" and this "but" throbbed with the ugly combination of circumstances—"without the best things of life," he philosophized, rolling a cigarette back and forth between his fingers, "without trust and love and success, money becomes a necessity. The moment is ill-chosen for bankruptcy!" At every recollection of the scene in Bagsby's drawing-room, he grew more bitter. Something of the childish Robert returned—hardness, scorn, a contempt for the judgment which placed him in his present position, gradually roused a latent determination in him to cease wanting what had been denied him. He smashed the cigarette into crumbs and flung it on the coals. "Grimshorn waits, Grimshorn is touchingly dependent on me. Grimshorn, thou shalt have my best!" and, drawing the table closer to him, "It now remains to be seen what a man can do who is not in pursuit of happiness."

For a time he rewrote, absorbed, until a sound in the corridor distracted him. "Confound it! Hardcastle's neighbors are a noisy lot." But this especial noise was advancing



towards Hardcastle's own rooms. The sharp tones of the hall-porter's voice called directions, which were carried out by a soft rustling of skirts left to trail over the stone stairs. Then a silence.

"It must have been the wind," thought the young lawyer, turning back to his work; but in the length of time it takes a timid woman to summon courage for the boldest deed her heart has ever prompted, the door opened. It closed again; and Halifax looked up to see his wife! A murmur of admiration escaped him. Fear and wonder darkened her eyes' mysterious depths; they pleaded the love which enveloped her face in a magic light.

"Robert!" she held out both hands. He made no answer.

"Robert!" she entreated, leaning towards him. "I came because I felt so dreadfully when you had gone. I couldn't stay away. I didn't mean that I mistrust you. I was so excited I hardly knew what I was doing."

He still did not answer, but, confident, she moved towards him, letting the long cloak that covered her slip from her shoulders to the ground; she loosened the scarf about her head, and tossed it away. Among all her dresses she had chosen the one Robert liked

best—a heavy gown of pale satin, whose rich folds emphasized the delicacy of her slender lines. Her throat and arms were bare. As he looked at her, his own indifference amazed him. He was untouched by anything she might say. Her sudden presence brought poignantly to him the scene of a few hours before. Could he give over to hands that had crushed them his wounded heart and pride? Was she conscious, he wondered, of all that she appeared to him—stately, superb, the woman who had overwhelmed him with happiness, his wife,—a child, a coquette, Bagsby's daughter, the woman who had scarred him with suffering?

At last he said, harshly, "You ought not to be here. I am surprised that they should let you come out alone at this time of night."

"I'm not alone," she answered.

"Ah!"

"No, and they didn't know I was coming. I was so dreadfully unhappy I had to come and find you. Robert," she said, impulsively placing both arms about his neck and looking up at him, "Robert, say something to me."

Under her husband's critical gaze, the color mounted to her cheeks, her head dropped upon his breast.



Withdrawing slightly, he unclasped her arms and put them away from him. "You have not forgotten?" he asked. "There is nothing altered in the situation. I am the same penniless beggar that I was a few hours ago."

Again approaching him, the young wife protested, she repeated assurances that money was nothing, that she had acted without reflection, that she needed only a moment's solitude after he left to find her real feelings. "I had never lost confidence in you," she affirmed, her eyes fixed on a coat-button around which she sent her fingers nervously. Not yet convinced of her husband's severity, sure that his indifference was only a mood, she spoke with grace and with the assurance of being loved. She could not but be conscious of her own exquisite charm, the warmth in her cheeks, the whiteness of her throat, her arms, the tenderness she expressed. The late hour, moreover, her evening gown, the strange surroundings, were romantic. Though she was Robert's wife, there was an impropriety in her presence at his bachelor chambers which gave it the stolen joy of a *rendezvous*, an encounter of two lovers. Her fingers traced again and again the button's edge, and through this con-

tact with an inanimate bit vibrated her adoration. Robert felt it; he, too, was conscious of her beauty.

"I don't care how poor you are," she argued. "Lots of happy people start out without a cent. We have love, and that's everything."

In a monotonous tone he reasoned: "Not only am I the same pauper as an hour ago, but there is nothing otherwise altered in the situation. If you couldn't trust me then, you could trust me still less now. I couldn't deny your father's accusations a few hours ago. I can't deny them now." His manner was defiant. Violet's fingers ceased to stir; her arm dropped listlessly; she moved backward to the table and leaned against it; from above the light shone down, making a halo of her hair and marking her quick-fading flush.

"I don't believe what father said," she breathed. "It wasn't—Mrs. Belford who kept you from me—was it?"

"That seems hardly worth denying?" He asked this in a rising inflection which implied she must agree with him. She leaned more heavily against the table, her pallor increased. Robert was sensitive to every line of suffering in her face. He knew well the question that was bound to follow—he despised it;



he had a sudden loathing of himself, of Victoria, of the network which composed his life, a swift wish to be free from every claim upon him. Each new thought that sped forward in his mind carried him farther from the woman who was mastered by one jealous idea, struggling for expression she was bound to give it. She felt the ground of determination slip from her. Her husband's indifference forced her purpose into new channels; power gave way to jealousy, charm became irritation. She knew it and was helpless.

"What," she cried, suddenly suffocated, "what *could* have made you stay with her?"

He could not answer. The excuses he might plead, what did they amount to? He could have chatted over them with Violet if she had chosen to be patient; discovered in haste, they must appear to her paltry, insufficient. He found no answer.

"What," she asked again, "what excuse *could* be a good one for keeping you from me?"

"Exactly," he agreed. He pushed the hair from his brow, shook back his head impatiently, and walked the length of the room, brushing her gown as he passed. By the door, he gathered up her scarf, her cloak. He brought them over and threw them on a divan



near where she was standing, then, turning, he said, sternly: "Come. It is very late; they must know by this time that you have left the hotel. They will be sending after you. I think it better that you should go at once."

This was a dismissal; he was sending her away; the husband she adored was no more than a stranger—she could not endure it; she had failed. Her heart throbbed with despair.

"Robert," she entreated, confused, "forgive me. Dearest," placing both arms about one of his, "don't you see I didn't mean it? Can't you help me? I don't care for what any one else says."

He looked at her long and steadily. She waited, her lips parted, trembling. In a low tone he affirmed: "You were never more lovely. But it is quite impossible to forget that I am a penniless wretch, and that"— he was making a search for Violet's wraps on the divan—"that," he concluded, as he found the sleeves and held the elaborate cloak out for his wife to put on, "the situation has not altered in any way during the past few hours."

With the folds of ermine and lace a mantle of ice seemed to fall upon her shoulders. She made an effort to speak. Against the force of Halifax's decision her will snapped. The



assurance that he loved her, which had first given her courage, was now frozen at its source, and in its place an embarrassment and mortification possessed her; her tenderness, her caresses, had been repulsed; she was being sent away, her weight of love augmented by a leaden despair. Her beautiful dress seemed tawdry, she was ashamed of her coquetry in wearing it, she hated the jewels that flashed on her bosom; one stone could release her husband from anxiety. With a formality which was worse than silence, he opened the door and acknowledged that if some one were waiting for her below he would prefer not going to the carriage. Half way out of the door she turned and spoke with difficulty, her words falling dead upon the air as though without a destiny:

"There is something different in it all to a few hours ago. I did not dream what you were suffering. Now I know. But," she added, simply, letting her long dress fall and clasping her hands, "I beg forgiveness."

Halifax bowed courteously.

An instant later the sound of his door closing, and of Violet's skirts rustling over the stony stairs, had died away into the midnight silences.



Chapter XVIII

DAWN IN HARDCASTLE'S CHAMBERS

ROBERT, without being able to give a reason for so doing, put a hand on the electric-light button, and snapped the illumination into darkness. In the shadows he began to stride up and down.

"Victoria! Victoria!" he groaned. "My wife is too high a price!" Here he drew himself up in the centre of the room, his head bowed, his hands behind his back, clinched tight. Every miserable circumstance had pitted against him, but he was above haggling with apologies in defence. "I was there to believe or reject," he muttered; "if my wife has failed me now, she will doubt me to-morrow." She was lost to him then irrevocably? This statement he angrily tossed aside. "Nonsense!" He began to bitterly blame his haste and to be stung with regret. Once again the young figure stood before his loving eyes to feast upon. With every step she with-



drew his pulses thrilled, and in the dark he stretched out his arms.

"My wife!" he said aloud—"my wife!" And at a knock, to which his exclamation seemed the response, the door of his room opened; the housekeeper, as she threw the door wide, said:

"Mrs. Halifax back, please, sir," and was gone.

Robert gave a cry, a fierce cry that shook him and shook the woman before him to the depths of her soul. Before she could speak he had her in his arms, holding her closely, as though even death between them should never come. He kissed her once, twice, and again, then his arms fell from her.

"My God!" said Halifax, and stepped back from her—"my God!"

She trembled before his tone, her head bowed, her hands covering her burning face; she shook with her feelings like a tree through which a wild, sudden wind sweeps in midsummer, possessing it until it quivers from root to apex.

There was silence for the space of a second, then the host cruelly turned up the light. It lit his face, whereon his feelings were displayed in curious warfare; it lit up Victoria



Belford; she, too, had gone back several steps, and now leaned against the door, as though she would keep the world without and herself within forever. With her hands still shielding her eyes from his, she waited immovable. And Halifax broke forth. He never knew what he said; no doubt he would have denied the words in open court, could he have heard them quoted. He forgot that she was a woman, that she loved him, as he poured out upon her his anger, fury, and sorrow, and his rebellion against her baleful influence upon his life, her distortion of his fate. Stinging with his remembrance of the moment before, the sense of her still in his arms, her cheek still soft against his lips, he spared her, with strange injustice, less at every word.

"And this is the crowning horror, to come to my very doors, to drag from me in a strange city the remnant of honor—your tragedy is complete!"

Mrs. Belford had discarded for this occasion her weeds; she was simply and darkly dressed. A little drooping, she received these vials of wrath poured upon her head as immovable as a statue of ancient Greece, and as lovely.

At length her companion paused for words, for breath, and, most of all, for heart to con-



tinue against her. He abruptly turned on his heel, marched to the window, and with his back to her, looked out at what was to be seen of London night, mist, and rain.

As for the woman, she had scarcely heard him. His shafts passed her harmless by, armored as she still was in the impregnable beauty of his embrace.

A thief, she had stolen it; but this, the highest bliss of her starved existence, had been greater, more poignant in its keen enjoyment because quick with pain. In the moment, as Robert held her to him, as she felt his heart beat on hers, she relinquished her soul, and into her bowed body it had scarcely yet returned.

After a little time she crept to him. Victoria Belford, whose poise and carriage were so greatly envied by her friends, crept across the floor, and before he was aware she had come very near.

But she had been in the distance nearer to the man than she could ever know.

His anger spent, his sharp disappointment passed that it was not his wife who had made one more splendid sortie to his desolate camp, he found himself free to feel and to remember that a woman had come to him—a beautiful

woman instinct with every charm to enchant and sway the senses.

"Robert," she whispered. He turned, pale and agitated, looking down at her from the little distance between their heights.

"I haven't really heard your words; they were dreadful, of course, but I can understand! You have been so horribly wronged, so disgracefully condemned wholesale, why should you be just to *me?* People who are your inferiors, not worthy to pronounce your name even, not of your class, have dared to misjudge you."

In the loneliness of his rooms (where, for all who had been his nearest, he might have remained alone forever), this voice, the first raised for him, dangerously charmed.

"You forget," she continued, "a few little details. You forget that I sent you from me of my own free will that day at the Astoria—ah—don't—don't say I am wrong! I have never been wrong about you!"

His anger made some exclamation. She removed her gloves, and he remarked, looking at her strong, supple white hands, whose contour he knew so well, that she had taken off her marriage ring. She stood so close to him that he was conscious of every movement of



her eyes and lips, of her breathing—of *her*, in fact, and he rebelled furiously.

"I have harmed you, without doubt. I am to blame, and I have come to retrieve."

"You have come to retrieve?" he repeated, in slow, measured tones.

"Yes," she breathed; "if I have brought you this ill, let me mend what I have marred. You know loyalty, Robert, better than any one in the world. At the first fling of the world your wife has left you. Is this your idea of love?"

"Leave the word of wife alone, please," he frowned at her for reply, scarcely vouchsafing any word distinct enough to hear.

"Yes, yes," she accepted quickly; "leave it—it doesn't seem to have meant much to her; it meant nothing to me. Was there a moment when I wouldn't have tossed its ban to the winds if it hadn't been for the honor of the man I love?" She paused, her face reddening from neck to brow under the pure fairness of her skin.

"Robert!" and she forced him to meet her mysterious eyes, whose chalices had been lifted for his soul to quaff many a time before. "All I have made you lose I will give back to you in a measure so wonderful that you will



marvel! I am rich—my fortune shall make your career. Oh, don't be chivalrous to the point of insulting me!" And she fairly shut his lips on his speech. "Whatever church and law has made her, God made me as well, and I have loved you loyally, solely, in the world."

Over him now the sea of feeling she had kept back swept its warm, subtle flood. "I am free," she went on, "free so late. My God! But not too late, for whatever I have of youth and power and knowledge of the world is yours to use."

He did exclaim here, and shook himself free from the tangle her words and emotions made around the wings of his soul.

"Listen," she was saying; "I have braved every scandal, but my imprudence has not harmed you. I called myself your wife, so that that woman down-stairs should have no suspicions. Of course I am practical in what I say. Robert, I will go away now, back to America, or wherever you like, and wait, and wait—until it is time. I know you so well, I understand you so perfectly, your tastes, your needs; I care so deeply for your success, for your brilliant success! Women loving less than I have helped to make men famous. Oh, listen, listen"—for Halifax was pitilessly lead-



ing her towards the door—"Robert, let them get their divorce, let them pursue their stupid way; then come—to—me. Robert! Robert!"

He stared gloomily before him.

"You appear to be awfully well up on this affair," he said, harshly. "How do you know about it?"

Trembling with her intense feelings, his words fell on her like a blight. She passed her hand over her eyes.

"I have seen Mr. West," she replied, mechanically. "I have read the papers—all the world knows Mr. Bagsby's stand."

By this they were in the centre of the room.

"I sailed for England on the same day with those ridiculous people," she said; "the hour I could in decency leave the city I came. It was enough for me to know you were poor, more than enough to know you were condemned." And the woman unconsciously touched the fatal spring, she awakened his sharp remembrance, and his heart ached anew.

This crisis displayed him better than the others in the eventful four weeks. He caught her by both her arms, the animal in him triumphant, his will, his desire, himself for the moment riding over humanity, kindness to her, and justice even.

"You love me?" he asked, very low.

"Ah!" she breathed, her eyes on his, and she feared him—she read there no word of good for her. "Ah! why do you need to ask me?"

"Because you can really prove it."

"Robert!"

"I have given ten years of my life as best I knew to serve a friend, and if I can't find a like service, my life is ruined," and as he held her arms he looked at her directly. "If my life's happiness is ruined and my wife's as well, you will be the cause."

She made a cry of protest.

"Yes," he repeated. "God is witness—"

She withdrew one arm from him and put it from hand to elbow against his chest, as though for a support, and on it she leaned her head. He made no repelling movement; not half an hour before she had been in his arms. He stood still as stone, and felt her shake with weeping. Her hair was against his lips, he scarcely breathed as for a few moments they stood thus. Then she raised her face and wiped her tears away. With a wonderful change of tone she demanded:

"Robert, if a friend such as you have been were found, what could be done?"



"Oh, I scarcely know," Halifax made a desperate gesture. "It's doubtless too late. Bagsby's iron; his mind is poisoned against me and you—he believes the worst. If Violet tries to rejoin me—she must give up hope of ever seeing her father again."

Mrs. Belford shrugged scorn.

"My wife," said Halifax, "is young and very good and pure, and she adores her father —she believes she has come to a man whose life is full of another woman."

The other woman stirred and made a low exclamation.

"It is—it has been," slowly said Halifax, "but I cannot tell her or him the reason —even to save my life's happiness. And more," he went on, "I have decided that unless Bagsby can be made to believe in me and to respect me, and unless I can show them a clear page—" He made an expressive gesture.

"Oh, what?" cried the woman.

"I shall get out of the way of them . . . please," he put his hand out sternly. "I shall go alone." His speech was gentler than his gesture, and the best of him shone in the eyes bent upon her. "Victoria, you must see how I love my wife."



Over the ball she had made of her fine pocket - handkerchief, and which she pressed into the palm of her slender right hand, she bent her beautiful face, pale now as death.

"I am a brute," he said. "When I allow myself to contemplate losing her, I would sacrifice my flesh and blood."

"Ah, I know," whispered the woman. "I know!" and before her tone he was dumb.

"Again"—and she hesitated after each word, as though speech hurt her. "Again, this—friend—what could this friend do?"

Halifax was smitten to his soul. Whatever the man might have demanded in the face of persistent love, his gallantry refused at this point to solicit. Moreover, with curious change of sentiment, in an instant he again scorned that the confidence of his wife should be bought by a price.

He took the hands of the woman and bent towards her with the understanding of long sympathy, the substitute for love—its tenderness, not its fire. "Nothing can be done," he said; "I am mad—mad with grief and brutalized with bitterness."

She shook her head lightly, and became in a sudden a remarkable semblance of her old



self. "No, no," she smiled, "I sha'n't forget; on the contrary, I shall be always remembering. I owe you so very much, Bobby—a great deal—it began ten years ago, on the 25th of August, do you remember?" And he crimsoned with the memory. At the sudden unfurling of the warm flag waving for a past festival, her own bright banners flashed, and thus the two paid a moment's tribute to a loyalty of years. With her regained control, returned her remarkable magnetism and charm. Seizing his hand, she lifted it to her lips; before she seemed to have touched the knob of the door, before he could speak to her or stay her, she was gone as quickly as she had come. But the room was full of her—a frail perfume she always used lingered in the air; he knew the scent well. A superstitious feeling that he should never see her again shot through him. He made an exclamation, and, as though to recall her, took a step forward, paused, for without he heard the sharp click of a closing carriage door. Like all those who desire a thing with sentiment and repel it with reason, he was conscious of a great relief. Going over to the window, he listened to the rumble of pneumatic tires, the click of the



horses' hoofs, and the fading tinkle of a distant bell.

When dawn came, blending its sickly pallor with lights electric and low firelight, it found Halifax at his table bent over the Grimshorn report, writing against Fate for Fame.



Chapter XIX

EMBERS REKINDLED

"HOW late it is growing!" Miss Prangle said to herself, drawing farther into the corner of the hansom, away from the piercing night wind which swept around by the entrance of Hardcastle's chambers. "What can Mrs. Halifax be doing?" She looked anxiously into the dark, where her heroine had disappeared an hour before, and wondered whether, in the joy of being together, the young husband and wife had forgotten the faithful guardian below. "I couldn't have refused her," she went on to herself; "she looked like an angel when she came into my room, trembling and so excited she could hardly breathe. 'Miss Prangle,' she said, 'I am dreadfully unhappy; couldn't you help me? I *must* find my husband—would you go with me?' and then she burst out crying. I got into my things as fast as I could— But it's cold," she shivered. "What can she be

doing? She's an angel. I'd go to the ends of earth to help her."

She leaned forward again, searching the dimly lighted entrance. Violet was coming; she could see the satin of her gown shimmer under the dull lamps; she climbed down and flew towards her, but the impetuous questions that rose to her lips were answered by an evident wish on the bride's part to be silent. Mutely the little governess helped her into the cab and gave the address, "Scott's Hotel."

When they had driven for a time, Violet said, in a voice which seemed loath to be heard: "Not Scott's Hotel; I shall never go back there. Tell him to Cambridge Street—No. 33."

Miss Prangle obeyed; her heart was overflowing with pity and tenderness; she could no longer quiet it.

"Something's happened." She put one arm around Violet's shoulder. "Your heart's just aching, I know; I can't bear to have you suffer so, but I feel perfectly sure it's going to be all right."

"Oh, do you think so?" the poor little bride asked, shaking her head. "How can it be? Perhaps I shall never see him again," and with this confession she leaned helplessly against Prangle; the tears came—tears that



summoned all her companion's womanly power of consolation.

"Don't think about it now," she comforted. "I don't know what it is that's troubling you, but everybody loves you, and it is sure to come out right." Prangle, in her simple woollen dress, turned tenderly towards the brilliant flower by her side. "I've never been in love," she said, timidly, "but you remember what they say about the course of true love—"

"According to that saying, mine must be very true. Don't you think it's terrible," she asked, "for a married woman to try and make another married woman unhappy?"

Prangle nodded violently. "I don't believe anything could be worse."

"And don't you think," she asked, the tears coming with this second question and the sympathy of her listener, "that Robert will understand I didn't mean it—"

"Of course, of course."

"I can't live without him—I shall die," she sobbed.

Prangle, not being *au courant*, could only murmur incoherent expressions, at the same time ministering to the young wife, drawing her own rough cape over Violet's satin gown, sheltering her from the wind, and, when they



reached the lodgings, lifting her like a wounded bird back to the old rooms, and forcing the bewildered Miss Hiddin to grant favors she had not dreamed herself capable of at midnight.

"Nobody knows we went out, do they?" Violet asked. "I don't want to frighten them, even if they have been so wrong."

Prangle assured her that the family were asleep when they left, and that she would go the first thing in the morning to explain.

"You understand, of course," Mrs. Halifax affirmed, "that I am never going back to my parents—*never*."

The governess was stationed within calling distance, and over and over during the night Violet's plaintive voice summoned her from the end of a nap. "I think my father has made a dreadful mistake—I don't believe I can ever forgive him. I won't even go back to the hotel; you will have to get my trunks to-morrow."

Or again, she would ask, pitifully: "Didn't you say that you felt things would be all right?" And Prangle, having taken that view from the first, answered faithfully, "I'm just sure it'll come out happily in the end."

"Tell me more," Violet urged, taking her hand and kissing it; "tell me you think he



will forgive me." Now and then the color rushed painfully over her face; she blushed with mortification at the remembrance of Robert's indifference, his severity. "When I put my arm about his neck," she thought, "he drew away from me."

The following day was one of confusion and discussion at Cambridge Street. Violet refused to see her parents; she refused to see a doctor, Aunt Carrie, Grove, or even a maid. She wanted nobody with her but Prangle, the distracted Prangle, who flew as messenger back and forth from Scott's Hotel to Cambridge Street, alternating between respectful severity and gentle persuasion with rapidity and tact in a situation she felt was the most important and romantic she had ever known.

Violet was listless; she refused to make any plans. "I don't care what I do," she said, in response to questions reiterated from Scott's Hotel. "I only know one thing—I shall never go back to my father. Unless I can live with my husband I'll live alone. I won't take a cent from my parents. I can support myself."

To Prangle, who knew the hard realities of life, this boast was one to be treated with indulgence.



"Of course you are capable of supporting yourself," she assured, "but it may be long before you get something to do. Won't you"—she blushed—"let me give you my savings? I don't need them, and I'd rather give them to you than anybody."

"Oh, I couldn't!" Mrs. Halifax protested; "you are the kindest person that ever lived. I still have plenty of money my father gave me when I was married. That doesn't count, but I won't take another penny now; you can say what you like to them. I won't see anybody, not anybody, unless—oh!"—she flushed—"do you think Robert might possibly come?"

Miss Prangle dared not tell her that Mrs. Bagsby, driven almost by force from Cambridge Street, had spent the day in search of Halifax—she had committed every impetuous indiscretion, augmenting the list of women callers who already excited the housekeeper's curiosity at Carlton Chambers, calling at Marlborough Club, and almost intruding upon a private audience of the Grimshorn directors—in vain.

Bagsby, too, had been manipulating. He found himself let into schemes and plots which at Bagsbyville a month before he would have sneered upon. "Something's got to be done,"



he argued. "It's gone long past the scandal point. If I don't get hold of a man to talk to I can't say what I won't do." He wished heartily for Raikes. "I believe I'll cable the boy; he'd know how to straighten affairs out quicker than anybody," and as he walked into the office of the hotel he ran across Patterfield West.

"Why, hello, old man!" he exclaimed, slapping West on the shoulder with a coaxing, youthful slap which signalled distress to the younger man. "You're the very person I was looking for," he went on, irrelevantly. "Things are going from bad to worse." He linked his arm affectionately through Patterfield's, and they wandered out together.

An hour later, as early twilight settled over London, and Violet ventured from her room to the sofa in Miss Hiddin's dismal parlor, assured that the family had been banished for the night, the bell rang and a card was brought to her. She lifted it from the tray, dropped it, and started to speak. Then she looked at it again. "Tell Mr. West I will see him," and as the maid went out she moved quickly over to the mirror, smoothed her hair, straightened the lace on her shoulders, looked for approval from the flushed image before



her, and then turned with her back to the fire, where she stood when the door opened and West entered.

He crossed the room with a long step, bowing over her hand, which he lifted to his lips.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, very much embarrassed, and trying to hide the color in her face by leaning over a massive arm-chair which she tugged towards the fire.

"Don't bother about that," he urged; "I can sit here."

"It's so cold, though, isn't it?" she asked, averting her face from his steady gaze.

"Yes, it is very cold," West reflected, absently. "Great heavens!"—to himself—"what a change! How wan she looks, and how the added feeling becomes her."

"I was so afraid you would not see me." His voice spoke gratitude.

"Oh!" she answered, lightly, as though she had been receiving visits all day; "of course I wanted to see you." She smoothed out the ribbon on the front of her gown, and then, looking up at West with an inspired smile which he felt presaged a confidence—

"Do you like London?" she asked. "I don't think I like it as well yet as Chicago," she hurried on, nervously. "I haven't seen



much, I've been so busy—I mean, I don't go out much."

West let her talk, content to watch the curve of her throat above her low collar, the sweep of her dark eyes, now timid, now confiding, the play of her white hands over the cushions, the line of her hair on her brow and temples.

"It's a —— shame to have given her an instant's suffering—the man's a cad."

"Are you going to stay long?" Another question in the list of formalities.

"I don't know," he answered; "it depends—"

"On business, of course, I suppose?"

"No," watching her closely, "not on business; it depends—on a woman—"

"Oh!" He noticed her slight scorn, and was gratified. "A young woman?" she asked, sarcastically.

"Yes, a very young woman."

"And pretty, of course?"

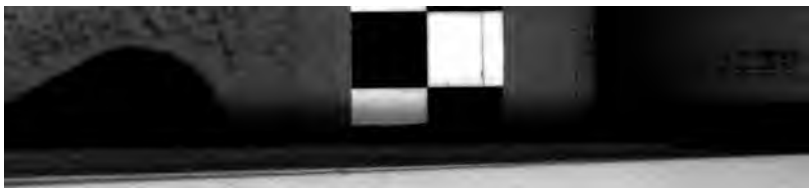
"More than pretty—radiant! Shall I describe her?"

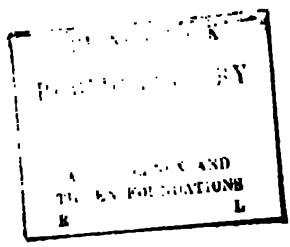
"Thank you," she said, tossing her ribbons about, "I can spare you that detail—you are probably prejudiced."

West was enchanted at the interest he was provoking. He looked sentimentally into the



"WEST LET HER TALK"




AND
TO BE RETURNED



fire. "Yes, I am prejudiced, there is no doubt of that."

"And where, may I ask, did you meet this radiant creature?"

"Oh, I met her some time ago—in fact, I was engaged to her at one time." He glanced quickly from the fire and found Violet's eyes riveted upon him. She let them drop hastily. "Indeed," she said; "how little we know of people's lives."

"Yes," West went on, this impersonal pleading favoring his eloquence. "A woman I loved for years—a child really, for she's only twenty now, but as strong in her influence over me as though she had possessed all the world's wisdom."

"Do you know her very well?"

"Yes and no. She was my ideal come to life; I knew her as well as one knows one's fondest dream."

"Why do you say 'I *knew* her?' Don't you know her now?"

"I know her now," he answered, nodding his head. "But this can't interest you?" He waited. Violet was too proud to confess.

"Men are all alike!" she exclaimed, suddenly. "I don't believe it's possible for them to really love. Marriage is a mistake—women



should be free, too — it's horrible to be a woman!" The color rose to affirm this outburst, and died away, leaving her pale, her eyes sparkling with tears.

Patterfield leaned forward. How adorable she was! Her angry denunciation of men, her tears, the returning languor of her manner. Could she not read the passionate declaration trembling on his lips?

"I don't really see," she said, resting against the cushions back of her, "why you came to see me to-day. If it was to tell me that you are in love with this radiant child who has had such a wonderful influence on you, it seems to me you chose an unfortunate time. Why don't you make your declarations to the young woman herself?"

"Because," smiling, "I don't dare."

"Why this sudden timidity, pray?"

"The woman I love," West stated, his smile fading away, "is a married woman!"

"Oh, but," she said, bitterly, "that is quite the proper thing. The fact of her being married should only simplify your fears. Married women *all* flirt," she emphasized, generalizing on the one beautiful Victoria, and forgetting her precious mother. "If you don't make love to this particular married



woman, somebody else will—not her husband, you may be sure," and Violet laughed, enjoying her own malice.

West was amazed. What a change from the naïve Violet Bagsby to this young wife, already disillusioned, reckless, and amused at her own worldly counsel, which she mistook for a triumph over unhappiness!

"That's your advice?" the young man asked.

"By all means. You can't reform society —it'll distress you if you take it seriously—so why not get as much fun out of it as possible?"

She glanced him over critically from head to foot. His clothes were of rough. gray serge, a touch of warm red in his cravat; his boots, his cuffs, his sleeve-links, every detail of his get-up was faultless, conventional, but worn with a personality which gave even his pockets charm.

"I will leave it to you," he said, returning her glance. "Shall I go back to America and say nothing, or shall I speak?"

"Don't hesitate," Violet exclaimed. Patterfield's devotion to some one else so soon after his declaration to her added zest to the shattering of her ideals.

It was an invitation—he was not brutal enough to accept it of a hostess unawares.



He rose and made a pretext of looking at some photographs on the mantel, and others on the table. Violet watched him, her foot swinging restlessly. She was doubtful of the effect her mood had upon him. Perhaps he intended going at once to court his married friend. She made some banal observations about the photographs. Patterfield walked behind the chair where she was sitting, and leaned over the high back. She was not sure whether he had touched her hair or not. She was frightened, her breath came quickly, he was so close she dared not move.

"Violet," he said, in a low, passionate voice, "I love you—I have tried to forget you—I cannot. I know that you have suffered. I must speak. I have followed every step you have taken since I came to London. I *will* tell you, I must. I adore you! Let me protect you—"

Violet's breath came quick and fast; her emotion, her silence, were they not an assent? West leaned over and kissed her hair, murmuring a caress.

"You mustn't," Violet protested, covering both hands over her face. "You mustn't."

Mingled with fear and wonder there was an instant of pride consoled. Halifax had re-



pulsed her, he had put her away from him, but here was some one who begged for a touch of her hand—a look.

"You mustn't," she murmured, as West kneeled by her side and sought to place his arm about her. "You must not."

He drew closer to her; she could feel his breath on her lips; his embrace was folding about her, strong as an eagle's wings; in an instant she could no longer free herself.

"Patterfield!" she cried, flinging herself from his arms. "How dreadful—don't touch me! This is your idea of protecting me! How could you think I meant myself when I told you to make love to a married woman? Don't you know that I love my husband? I love him better than the whole world put together. If he never spoke to me again I should still love him. Is this your idea of helping me? Oh, poor woman! I thought you were my friend. I trusted you—Patterfield, how could you?"

She bowed her head and sank on the sofa. West, confused and overwhelmed for a moment, resumed a manner that had nothing tragic in it.

"I have no excuse," he said, simply, "except that I love you so that I hardly know what



I am doing. I don't ask forgiveness. I meant every word."

Violet shook her head without looking up.

"I might have spared you additional suffering," he added, tenderly, "but I couldn't even do that—I couldn't see you and not speak. I have lost everything. Pity me a little."

"Patterfield," she murmured, and one white hand she held towards him. He took it for an instant, and then turned and was gone. How ill he had served as Bagsby's messenger! How dark the lodging's staircase, how piercing the night's wind—how lonely a man could be among London's millions of men!





"HALIFAX CAME OUT BETWEEN APPLEYARD AND FOXHARROWORTH"



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Chapter XX

GRIMSHORN MOVES UPWARD

THOSE who have followed the history of the various financial ventures involving wise and foolish in New York, Paris, and London during the nineteenth century, will not be slow to recall the famous speculation of the Grimshorn Mines in Mexico. After the company had been organized, the board of directors formed, and the stock put upon the market, when the gigantic ball of speculation was well on its roll of success, gathering in proportion at every turn, the sudden appearance of a hidden claim created a flaw in the contracts, and this discovery, from the moment of its revelation to the principals, was certain to render the English company's deeds null and void. The returns, greater even than predicted, would be called for in gross by the at present unconscious owners, unless some subtle legal light could illumine a way out of the embarrassment. Robert Halifax repre-



sented the American interest, and in Mexico, while there on a matter of slight moment, he had suddenly discovered these sinister facts.

For six weeks he weighed every detail of the matter, followed in secret every thread to the end, and when the London gentlemen received his report they summoned him forthwith to England. The situation on the Stock Exchange was next to desperate. A little time before rumor had awakened current distrust, causing an alarming drop in the stock, and these conditions the Wall Street panic had not bettered.

At this juncture the balancing time was past; and unless immediate solution were found for the problem in hand, the markets were to witness a wreck only equalled by the South Sea Bubble in London, and a late scandal in France. A private conference with Sir Foxharroworth, a two days' close consultation of documents and examination of papers and reference to English and American legal volumes, matured the opinions Halifax had formed in Mexico, and confirmed his conclusions. A board meeting was called for the Wednesday following his arrival in London. The presence of several distinguished men of



law was solicited, and the brilliant Lord Morr consented to act as referee.

Whereas nothing definite was known, no fear confirmed, the public was ready to take a disastrous flight. Grimshorn had as yet published no statement, the date for its promised appearance had passed, and only the fact that some of the largest fortunes in England had flowed to Grimshorn, and that the conservatives "held on," had kept a fatal calamity back this long.

The American's sanguine view from the first impressed the grave gentlemen as "Yankee bluff," as Foxharroworth said, and the result of the meeting in January was awaited, with all to dread and nothing to hope.

Halifax, tremendously excited, every nerve keen, dressed himself by electric light in an uncongenial, ill-boding, gray atmosphere supposed to be day. He had written through the preceding night, and the time's supreme importance had crowded everything for the moment out of his mind. On the table close to his bed, papers were scattered as though hurricane-tossed; law books were piled on every chair, and even raised their red-labelled backs upward where they were dropped face open on the floor.



A tray with coffee-cups and coffee-pot and a saucer heaped high with cigarette ashes stood among the disorder; black coffee and constant cigarettes had kept him going until six, then he tumbled into bed and slept three hours. He stood at length dressed *de rigueur* for appearance in the city, and into his waistcoat pocket he thrust a small note-book full of references, although he quite intended to speak without consulting its pages. The little book was a beautiful object of dark-green leather, on which his initials, in twisted gold wire, stood out round and clear. It was Violet's first gift to him; he pressed his hand over it as it lay against his heart; it seemed to him now a talisman. He was setting out at this moment to meet the crisis of his career; all ways had led, hitherto, towards one road, and, although a wife was his, a lovely creature full of a hundred charms to strengthen and to solace, he went forth more sole, more unspeeded than if he had been unwed.

He had said to Algernon Hardcastle the day before, "I would like to tell everybody I know to buy Grimshorn. I can't, of course, promise that to-morrow will dawn; I predict, however, that it will. It has dawned for sev-



eral thousand years. We may run against a meteor to-night—but—"

"Are you that sure, Bobby?"

"Oh, if I had twenty thousand pounds," he groaned, "I would be a millionaire the day after the statement."

Hardcastle remembered a few scenes in Nevada, an incident or two when Halifax had pulled him out of holes tight enough to have squeezed the life out of him. He was himself loaded to the plimsol with Grimshorn; but he took £20,000 and bought all he could (and it was flung at him right and left); he bought for Halifax in his name, on a margin, and hoped for the best.

Halifax drove to the —— Building in Foxharroworth's brougham, and alone, for which latter fact he was thankful; he sat, his arms folded, a little pale, but with decidedly less emotion than twenty-four hours before, when his wife had tempted him to cowardice. He entered the —— Building with some men he knew and many he did not know. He entered, a man unheard of in London, of mediocre celebrity, certainly ignored by the mass. Four hours later he came out distinguished for the rest of his life; a marked man at thirty; his reputation made in two continents; and,



though ignorant of the fact, owner of several blocks of Grimshorn, which stock was only waiting for the impetus his clear investigations, his inspired solution should give, to go on its fortune-making way. Halifax did not come out carried on the shoulders of his peers; he came out between Appleyard and Foxharroworth. The former had Robert's arm; he held it affectionately—pressed it, indeed. Appleyard was boyishly glad that he could send word to the contractors to go on with his steam yacht.

The news was bulletined on the exchange that Grimshorn would publish its statement on a given date. Its probably favorable revelations were rumored as freely as the evil reports had been; the stock began to move. Future millionaires were predicted in certain share-holders, and there was a rush for Grimshorn. Halifax was pointed out first at the clubs, finally in the streets, and although the minutes of that famous meeting have never been made public, it was known, however, pretty generally, that the American lawyer, backed and sustained by such lights as Foxharroworth and Lord Morr, had by a brilliant scheme floated Grimshorn to the high sea of success.



GRIMSHORN MOVES UPWARD

Once again the newspapers rang with the name of Robert Halifax, this time in a different tune. In New York a second company was formed; he was offered the secretaryship, and when Grimshorn was hard to get, Hardcastle thought his time was come!

He found Robert rather dreary, moping close in his chambers, almost into the fireplace, his pipe out.

With no preamble the Englishman laid down before his friend a packet of registered certificates and a heap of bank-notes and gold.

"You remember your clever little prophecy?" The visitor spoke rapidly to the white-faced, staring Halifax. "Your original little prediction about the world's going right along if we didn't run into a comet, or something of that sort, and your allusions at the same time to Grimshorn? I took the risk for you, old chap. Oh, come, I say, that's all right! You see you owe me a good bit of this"—he took up a heap of notes, laughing cheerfully—"a little matter of twenty thousand—advanced for fourteen days, interest to date, if you like, and so forth. Come, my dear man—"

For Halifax gripped him hard. Several of the certificates fell to the floor.

"You can pay up, I expect, Bobby." Hard-



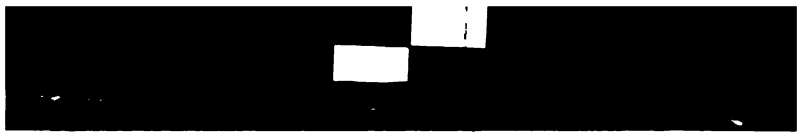
castle, red with pleasure and fumbling with embarrassment, bent his tall height to gather up the papers. "And you see," he went on, nervously, filling up the time to avoid thanks, "you don't sail up alone in Grimshorn! We're all with you, pecking at stars, by Jove!"

After his friend had gone, Robert locked away the certificates in his strong-box. He stood looking round at this hospitable room, his heart swelling at the thought of Burden and Hardcastle. With hands behind his back and head bowed, he reviewed the extraordinary experiences of the past four weeks. This nook set apart for the easy life of bachelorhood had sheltered him, the newly wedded, the greatly tried, the solitary, and the dearly sought. He had made here the slow race through deep midnight, to pale dawn, to this high noon.

He was rich, he was famous; through the window curtains, well drawn back, poured a rare flood of winter sunlight. It had triumphed over traditional fog, and, pure and strong, filled the room, changing the very objects before him into gold. He thought with an immense joy and great relief of his fortune. "I will take it all to her," he said, half aloud. "To her. If she will none of it, it is dust for fools to play with! And"—he smiled a little



at his strange phrase—"if she will have me, why even the fame and fortune are only good things in so far as they can give her pleasure, for she is all. Violet," said her husband, "*is* the world and riches, and fame and love." He stirred as though he had awakened out of a stupor. "Love," he said, softly; "have I waited too long?"



Chapter XXI

VICTORIA BELFORD

CAMDEN G. BAGSBY was revelling in the sole possession of the drawing-room of his suite at Scott's Hotel. Mrs. Bagsby, Aunt Carrie, Grove, and Miss Prangle had gone to "do the gal'ry." In the fireplace burned "a tuppenny fire at a pound a coal," as the capsule king had said when he compared his fire bill with the grate's dimensions. The red glow, nevertheless, made a bright spot in the vast dinginess of the room. Bagsby wore the traditional smoking-jacket of black quilted silk, his feet displayed a pair of elaborate embroidered slippers. He had removed his waistcoat, and over his spotless white shirt, under his jacket, could be seen by flashes one more proof of talent and devotion—a brilliant pair of hand-worked suspenders. From the centre-table he had removed all the "dew-dabs," as he called the guide-books, photographs, and the few home ornaments Mrs.



Bagsby had fetched to "cheer up the room," and installed his blotter and inkstand. Crises of emotion, heart-wringings, separations, marriage, and divorce, might play havoc with nerves and wreck calm, but business went dully on in Chicago. Bagsby was annoyingly behind in his correspondence. He missed his secretary, and with a sigh of genuine relief he put himself before his papers, glad at being forced to give all of his mind and none of his heart to the affairs at hand.

The silence was conducive to work, the cracking coals and the muffled street noises soothed rather than disturbed. He unfolded a letter from Raikes and perused its enlivening details: "*The insurance on the Spooneyville plant, expiring, etc.*, 1902, *is, I think, insufficient since the addition of the new capsule silver-coating machine.*" And with this came a knock at the door. To his absent response the housemaid appeared.

"If you please, sir, a lady, sir."

"Mrs. Bagsby is out." Bagsby's eyes were still on his letter.

"It was *Mr.* Bagsby, m'm, isn't it, m'm?" the maid turned to ask the caller, and Bagsby sprang to his feet.

"Yes, it was *Mr.* Bagsby," said a woman's



voice, and before the gentleman was aware, or could protest, the speaker entered in the heavy drapery of widow's weeds.

The host buttoned one frog of his wadded silk jacket. "Mrs. Bagsby and Miss Bagsby are out," but the visitor crossed the room towards him.

"Mr. Bagsby"—she made a graceful inclination—"please forgive the interruption. I am Mrs. Belford, of Chicago."

Bagsby put his letter down; he came out from behind the table, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets. Determined to mistake her visit, "My wife is out," he repeated again.

"I know," returned the woman, smiling a little; "I chose my time. I didn't send up my name; I was afraid I wouldn't be fortunate." She found her advance difficult. Her host was immovable and silent, his face a mask. "I have bearded the lion," she thought swiftly; "I shall treat him like a lamb." Therefore she bent upon Camden Bagsby her most charming of smiles. "Mr. Bagsby, I want very much to talk to you a few moments."

"I don't believe you have got anything to say I want to hear." Under his brow's shelter Bagsby was considering the face of Mrs. Amos Belford. Her brows were high and



clear, her nostrils sensitive; her mouth was beautiful, determined.

"Oh," she frankly said, "please let me prove you are wrong."

He lifted a chair by its back, placing it opposite the sofa. "Let's sit down," he invited shortly, and seated himself in front of her. Around her face her crape veil fell like a dense shadow become substance; her hands, in their gloves of dull black suède, lay motionless in her lap.

"I believe you mean to be just," she said, "but you are frightfully wrong and cruelly mistaken; I don't think you will refuse me the chance of proving this, Mr. Bagsby."

"I don't pretend not to know what you mean," replied her host; "you have taken me by surprise. You want to speak to me in Robert Halifax's behalf."

Her face crimsoned under the glow the name caused. At this she caught sight of a pile of unfurled newspapers on a chair. She waved to them and laughed a little.

"Every one has something to say for Mr. Halifax to-day, haven't they?"

Bagsby followed the gesture.

"My penny streamers would be lost in this splendid massing of flags!"



She drew herself up, although her figure at ease even had the bearing of a queen at high council.

"I want to speak to you on your daughter's behalf!"

Bagsby half rose, but whatever his impulse he altered it and resumed his seat, quickly tapping his fingers on a little table near which he sat.

"Ah"—his voice was low and indistinct—"*you* want to speak to me about Violet," he slowly said.

"You yourself used the word behalf, Mr. Bagsby," returned the woman, softly—"'behalf'—well, possibly, when I'm done, you will think it still in behalf of the man, but from the woman's standpoint, I think I am speaking for"—she subtly avoided the name—"for the wife."

To Bagsby's best belief, before him sat the person who had thus far wrecked his child's happiness. The name she bore was detestable—the name she was defending was scarcely more to be endured. He dared not trust his voice lest it bid her furiously be gone. While he sought to control his anger she continued:

"I understand—indeed, it is generally un-

derstood—that you are urging your daughter to a divorce. To force her taking this position against the man she loves, you must think very badly of Mr. Halifax indeed."

Bagsby made a low articulation, which his visitor ignored; for this he was grateful.

"He lost on a sudden all his money—unworthy reason, unworthy!" (Would she dare misapprehend?)

"*You know that is not the reason,*" said the father.

"Because, then, in a state of mental excitement on the night of his losses, he did what many another man has done and kept his status—played away a few thousands at cards. Puritan—unchristian!"

"You know those are no reasons"— Bagsby's hands were outspread on his knees, his strong fingers wide apart. He bent across the distance between himself and this strange person, his clear gaze filmed by a mist of anger; his lips trembled. There was nothing brazen or defiant in the face on which Camden Bagsby looked, while Halifax's mistress (such Bagsby believed her), under cover of the wife's behalf, pleaded for Halifax.

"I know these are not the reasons," she was saying, "and I won't ask you to tell me the



real one. It would be easy for me to contradict it point blank to you; but that is less than I want. I want you to know the man you are condemning to his wife." And here for the first time the Westerner was touched below the formal surface with which he was covering his anger and dislike; to his acute ear the notes rang true.

"What I ought to say will not be easy," she said. "Thank you for helping me thus far." (Bagsby wondered.) "You are quite right in thinking that we have been intimate friends for ten years," she said, "and I am going to tell you why. I met Mr. Halifax in the first summer after he had left college, at a hotel in the White Mountains where I was passing two months with my husband and little girl. I found him very young, very charming, chivalrous, full of ideals, and a loyal friend. I was not, as you suppose, in love with Mr. Halifax." And here Mrs. Belford's manner changed, her tone grew warm and agitated; she clasped her hands together until the glove skin was drawn tight over them.

"At midnight in the first week of our acquaintance I was awakened by a noise in my husband's room. I ought to have been sufficiently accustomed to those shocks not to



have weakened, as I did on this occasion. But I was frightened to death; I had sworn to myself that I would never fail, however, and I managed to make a light and get to the room. Mr. Belford was in the most awful state of drunken mania I had yet seen. I had never failed to calm him before, but I think he knew I was afraid, for he sprang on me like a wild man. I am strong"—she held out her arms. "I am not a coward, either." She didn't need to say it; Bagsby made a gesture that confirmed her. "And I struggled as well as I could, silently."

"But why," interrupted her auditor, "*why* didn't you call?"

"I did at last, and somebody rushed in and held my husband fast. It was Mr. Halifax; he had heard me on his way to his rooms above us. I wouldn't let him call any one else, and he had no difficulty in getting Mr. Belford quiet. The moment my fear left me, which it did instantly, a strong aid came, my old power over my husband returned. We gave him the medicines I had always at hand, and he slept."

Mrs. Belford shuddered perceptibly; her horrible past, as she told it, became a present thing.

"Then and there I made Mr. Halifax give



me his sacred oath never to tell what he had seen, and to help me keep my secret."

"You were wrong, I think," said Mr. Bagsby, and would have gone on—

"Please suspend your judgment in the case," she said, bitterly, and bowed a little.

"On the following day, it was the 25th of August"—she ceased to look at Mr. Bagsby, who observed her the more closely—"my husband kept his room, and I had a long, long talk with Mr. Halifax. I explained to him Mr. Belford's singular disorder, which the least stimulant converted to mania." She moistened her lips a little. "It was an inherited horror," she said, slowly, "too dreadful to contemplate, revealed to me for the first when my little girl was a year old. Mr. Halifax urged, as you will understand, that Mr. Belford should go to an asylum. He urged my health, my safety—reasonable advice, wasn't it?" And she appealed to her host, looking directly at him.

"Certainly, common sense only."

"Quite!" acquiesced Mrs. Belford. "How little you know of the lives you judge! How easy it is to arrange impossible plans for others. How delightfully easy it is to decide what is right for our neighbor, isn't it?"



"You had reason and the law with you," murmured Bagsby.

She smiled. "I have yet to rest with any real comfort on the bosom of the law. Mr. Belford not only refused absolutely to go to an asylum, he refused even a nurse; he refused to do anything but live his life, like his rational neighbor, with his wife at his side."

Here Mr. Bagsby fairly grunted his impatience. "Nonsense! Rubbish! He should not have been asked."

Again Mrs. Belford bowed to superior wisdom—with the smile of one who sees beneath the "horror" and understands its irony; it is then the spirit becomes sardonic.

"He was not only consulted—he was obeyed. His threat (which I assure you he would have carried out) that he would kill himself the hour I left him bound me hand and foot."

Bagsby again dared to gesture. "Small loss—why not risked?"

"You will see. My husband inherited his very large fortune under the following testament: The money should go to his widow and to her children in the case of his dying a *natural death after* the age of forty. A *natural death,* mark you; in case of accident,



an early death from illness even, in case of suicide, my child and I were left penniless."

"Queer clause," said Bagsby, staring.

"Very queer," agreed Mrs. Belford; "very sinister, too, isn't it? You see, my husband's father, grandfather, brother, and uncle had all committed suicide, and the poor mother who left my husband the fortune tried as best she knew to break the morbid chain of self-slaughter. Do you wonder that I tried to lift the curse from my child's inheritance and to secure her material welfare? To see her the child of a drunken suicide—and a pauper—you will agree with me was not a pleasant prospect."

There was a moment of silence; the coals dropped in the grate. When Victoria continued her voice was softened.

"To go back," she meditated, "to the 25th of August—to go back," and as she said the date it seemed that she would gladly go back and stay with its memories forever. "Mr. Halifax, when he heard what I have told you, chose, because he was young and kind and free, to take a sort of chivalrous part in the tragedy. He gave me a promise of friendship. He pitied me very much, I think," she continued gently, and betrayed her tenderness,



"and he looked upon the slander and misunderstanding of the world as a kind of warfare which he was willing to fight against. My husband died, as you know, a natural death five years after the date required by the testament."

Here she paused, considering her folded hands a moment closely, and then raised her eyes to Bagsby.

"This was my unenviable existence for ten years, and at its close I had secured my child's future and the world's complete ignorance. My maid, Mr. Halifax, and myself alone knew what I am telling you, Mr. Bagsby. Mr. Belford was an Autralian. Americans knew nothing of his antecedents or affairs. Please," she said, interrupting what he tried to say—"please don't let us go into the *moralc* of this. I don't know what duty was in this case. I think it ought to have a special code, really. If it had not been for my child"—she made an expressive gesture. "But, at all events, I do know that I owe everything to Mr. Halifax, even my life, for without his never-failing courage, his friendship, the strain alone would have killed me, if my husband had not." Her cheeks glowed, and she communicated to her hearer some of her



excitement; his foot restlessly tapped the floor.

"Of course you will say that I have completely sacrificed Mr. Halifax. You will be right. I have sacrificed him for my child. I didn't care a straw for the world's scandal so long as my husband didn't take his life."

"Do you think a mother has any right to make light of her reputation?" asked the old man.

"If my child blames me," replied Victoria, slowly, "it will be the culmination."

"I don't see," pursued Bagsby, "how the young man felt he had any right to leave you before he saw you quite out."

The woman, at the question, was silent too long—with lightning rapidity she was arguing to herself: "I must not let him see that I love Robert — it will make him wish me far from their horizon—he will mistrust me—he must not dream—why should I endure this last blow—exile?"

"Because," she said, slowly, "on that 25th of August to which I referred, we made a solemn compact that whenever Robert should love a woman he should make his life independent of my cross. My husband of late



years, too, had helped to free Mr. Halifax. He grew to distrust him for some ridiculous reason, and he determined not only to prolong his life but to live normally."

Bagsby's keenness was reading all she hoped to conceal.

"And," she went on, "for months during this last year his life was beyond reproach—indeed, we began to believe he was entirely cured."

Mr. Bagsby stirred, mentally closed the book of Victoria's life, which she had generously thrown wide. Minutely he considered its effect on the romance of his own child's life.

"I've seen a good deal of sad things," he spoke, unbending his brows, "and I've had not a few private views of lives too strange to show to the general public. What you have been telling me is one of the strangest. You couldn't have done more for this little girl of yours if you'd made her soul as well as her body," he continued, his voice sounding very calm and controlled after the rapid, intense tone so long filling the air. "You see how I feel about my girl. I'm going to keep out of her life everything that could hurt her in the future. What you have told me don't, to my mind, touch my view of the matter.



Halifax made his choice before he saw my daughter."

With a quick gesture the woman broke in. "That I deny—and now comes my point—blank denial. Robert Halifax has never been anything to me but a friend. What can I call to witness?"

For Bagsby the supreme moment had come; he was at last, *at last*, getting to rock bottom. On Victoria's breast was a small, black medallion surrounded by diamonds. "In this is my little girl's picture," and she clasped the locket.

But Bagsby— "Ah, stop!" He put out a forbidding hand. "Don't! let's just keep the little girl out of this."

She dropped the medallion, and it fell on the soft folds of her black dress, the disturbed diamonds flashing stars.

"Mr. Halifax loves his wife—he has never loved any woman but his wife." And as she gave this statement slowly out, her drawn whiteness betrayed the pain it caused, but the countenance of Violet's father was good to look upon. It cleared, it brightened like a long siege after storm.

"If when I first came in I had made this statement solely, important although it is, you

would not have listened, still less believed. I am sure you trust me now."

She felt as though her frozen heart was still susceptible, and every word she spoke smote with a hammer of pain. "Oh, Robert, Robert," she breathed, and so nearly did she breathe it aloud that she rose, frightened, to further daring. She realized that Mr. Bagsby had given no sign of being vanquished. She had played for the highest stakes. She must know how she stood. Intently she studied his quiet reserve as he meditated, turning over what she had laid before him. Mr. Bagsby was now convinced, and *of what?*

She broke the silence. "Haven't I been explicit enough? What is it, Mr. Bagsby—*what* last stone lies in the way?"

Quick as light the old man flashed his fine eyes on her.

"The same stone," he said. "It hasn't moved. It's big enough to throw the whole train into perdition."

The room swam before her eyes—she grew deadly white.

"Oh, really," and she tried to laugh, "you *are* mysterious, Mr. Bagsby. I don't see."

"You are a very beautiful woman," returned the father, slowly. "You are young,



and you know the world. A woman like you only loves once in her life, and when she does she clings to what she loves. A man's heart is a very dangerous thing—it plays him queer tricks. To my mind there's nothing in the universe like the first love—ten years—twenty years—a life—it's the same!—and love attracts love, they say—and you are free." He paused for a breath. "It isn't exactly that I am afraid my little girl can't keep the heart of the man she loves—it wouldn't be right to her to doubt it. But we've got to remove from her new life an old association that can't help but do harm. Already it has pretty near wrecked the ship." He shook his head.

"I have told you that Mr. Halifax never loved me," broke in Mrs. Belford. "For God's sake, what more do you want?" But he wouldn't help her.

"You don't really want me to swear that I don't love *him?*" She tried to assume her old lightness of manner, the best cloak she knew, but it had the effect of steeling Bagsby, to whom the world's ways were strange.

"I want you to do more," he said, sternly.

"More?"

"I want you to prove it."

Now she was silent, and left all to the old

man, looking at her so seriously through his glasses, his wadded black coat buttoned across his ample chest. While they talked the fire had died; no one had come to put on coals, and the room was cold. Victoria shivered.

"I want you to promise me never to see him again."

She didn't start, well prepared as she was for the last blow.

"That would be a social impossibility," she returned, calmly; "we live in the same city."

"You must cease to," said Camden G. Bagsby.

Then she clasped her hands on her heart, caught her breath, and craned her long neck out, as she repeated to him across the room in a whisper:

"You mean to—say—you want me to give up my home—to go out of my country—perhaps to—to—"

"I mean," he said, "unless you promise me that, in so far as in your power lies, you will never see Robert Halifax again, that you will pass from the horizon of this man and his wife, I shall continue to do the best in my power to influence my daughter to proceed for divorce."

She knew the room swam now; to keep



steady she seized the chair's back. What right, she stormed—ridiculous! What right had this man to make this demand on her? Standing before him, she frowned, bit her lips, and her face became that which, had he lifted his eyes from the study and restudy of his inkstand and blotter, he would have been sad to see. But the old man was merciful. If she waited too long he would know. After all, she had done more than her part—let them get the divorce. But Victoria felt at that instant Robert's hands clasp her wrists. She saw his angry eyes as he said to her, "If my life is ruined, God is witness you are the cause."

For an instant the lids half closed over her lovely eyes. She tried to foresee the result of her refusal. Man and wife would rejoin in spite of the old man, at all hazards. In him, in Robert Halifax, was the essence of life to her. She drew a long, inward breath.

"Is this your final decision, Mr. Bagsby?" She took a step forward, as though she would make a plea—indeed, she half put out her hand.

"Yes," said Camden Bagsby.

And this, then, was Robert's test.

So far she had kept her youth; she felt it slip from her like a garment; her face was

gray and old as she lifted it to Violet's father, who, impassive, waited, waited. Sympathy he could not give, though his heart ached with it. Between this suffering and his kindness fate had fixed a great gulf.

And then, mercifully, she remembered her child. Through the *mousseline de soie* of her bodice the heavy ornament rose and fell; it seemed at the moment to press upon her heart with a weight crushing and mortal. Tears burned under her eyelids. "Perhaps — in some way—" She tried in vain to lay hold upon the nonchalance of worldliness to carry well for her her concession to fate.

Mr. Bagsby, standing with infinite patience, his eyes filming as they gazed at the Spooneyville insurance papers, heard at length a word from the long-silent woman.

"I will consent to what you ask."

He came forward quickly; he put out his large, kind hand; he took the slender, gloved hand.

"Perhaps," she slowly articulated, "some one will be kind some day to my daughter—I have done this in behalf of yours."

"Thank you," said the father.

Here the sound of voices in the hall made them both start.



"It's my folks," said Mr. Bagsby, quickly; "perhaps you won't care to see them."

Mrs. Belford drew her veil over her face. "Oh no, *no!*" she hurried.

"Then you can go right out by this door," and he opened one for her as he spoke, into a side entry.

It had scarcely closed upon her before the room was noisy and alive with the sight-seers once more returned.

"My sakes, Camden, how cold you've got this room," said his sister, as though it had been an especial temperature Bagsby had arranged in which to take cold. "You'll certainly have the grip. It's cold as the tomb."

"Dear, yes," echoed Mrs. Bagsby. "Will you just ring for some coals, Miss Prangle? Done any work, dear?" she asked, affectionately.

Bagsby had drawn her hand through his arm. "Why, yes—yes—I guess I've done some," he replied.

His wife saw that he was disturbed, and, in perfect response to his moods until she could ask for enlightenment, she covered his hand with her own.

Grove had entered after the others. Taking off his overcoat, and silk handkerchief and cap,



he came up to his father and mother and stood before them, his cheeks bright as his shock of hair.

"Say, poppa," he rehearsed, eagerly, "there's a first-class carriage in front of the ho-tel, 'n' ripping horses."

"Camden"— Miss Bagsby had seated herself as close to the fireplace as she could, extending her broad, flat toes towards the fender —"Camden, I guess we've pretty much covered every square inch of that picture hall—and the pictures are elegant—you ought to see them. I was real pleased to see the life sizes of those I've got the lithographs of."

Bagsby, meanwhile, absently and mildly gazed down at his bright-eyed son. Grove was waiting the pause to go on—his red lips parted over his white, perfect teeth—his one beauty.

"Say," he continued, "and there's a little girl in the carriage. I stopped and talked to her through the winder. Her mother was makin' calls in the ho-tel. She's the *dandiest* little girl!" he said, enthusiastically. "I've got a mash on her."

Mrs. Bagsby and Aunt Carrie laughed. "Grovie," said his mother, "that's not a nice word, dear."



Bagsby put his hand through the red crop, scarcely hearing.

"Yep, this is a real mash," he nodded. "She is going on 'leven. She's an American, too, poppa. I'm going to marry her when I grow up. Cross my heart!"

"Grove!" expostulated his mother again.

"I've got to marry her," he said, in a determined voice, "and she don't know if she's named after the Queen or not; her name's Victoria—Victoria Belford!"



Chapter XXII

A MAN AND HIS WIFE

ROBERT HALIFAX, rushing from Hardcastle's chambers, bold with determination to take his wife unto him as magnificently as in wounded pride he had sent her from him —glowing with the thought of mutual reconciliation—found himself brought up against the traditional stone wall at a quick, quivering halt.

Violet was not to be found. The Bagsbys knew to the extent that she was well, safe, and had gone home! With a *beau geste* quite as superb as Robert's she swept away every tie not hers and her husband's. She had refused to see her people since the night Robert had shut her out into its shadows. Cambridge Street once again had given her up into the unknown.

The Bagsbys were *en route* for America, and a second time the parlor in Scott's Hotel made the meeting-ground for father and son-in-law.



The packing of trunks went cheerfully forward, servants, tradespeople, Aunt Carrie, little boy, governess, made faithful pilgrimages across the floor, while Mrs. Bagsby issued directions from her divan in the corner, where, propped up by pillows, flanked by nerve medicines, she was slowly returning to a state resembling calm.

Of the commotion and noise the two men, facing each other in the window's embrasure, conversing in an absorbed undertone, were unconscious. Mr. Bagsby had a pardon to ask, and he asked it. Halifax felt he had ten years and a day to justify.

"I have been made the sport of circumstances . . . Fortune's toy," he began.

To his surprise, Bagsby, his hand on the young man's arm, insisted, "Let the past go. Not a word," and he would not be gainsaid.

When the door finally closed on the hurrying, departing Halifax, an adjoining door opened softly, and a young person who had been one of the populous parlor slipped into the corridor and rapidly followed him down the stairs to the office of the hotel.

"I must speak to you, Mr. Halifax, just a second. I am Miss Prangle. Could we, shall we, step into the—the elevator?" She looked



about in a state of nervous excitement. Halifax suggested the reading-room as more stable ground. This man, whom the little governess knew her adored lady so dearly loved, she had watched during his hour in the Bagsbys' parlor, with who shall say what keenness, what interest, loyal and disloyal. She had seen him kiss Mrs. Bagsby, and that tender heart weep over him. She had seen him bid good-bye to a tearful child, in whose eyes he was a glorified hero. She had watched him talking to the father. Then she took the boldest dash of her life down the hallway.

"Oh!" she gasped, "*have* you any idea where Mrs. Halifax is?"

He looked at her surprised, and saw only friendly anxiety for Violet.

"No," he responded, gloomily, "none; no idea whatsoever. But don't be so distressed, Miss Prangle! I dare say it will only be a matter of a few days."

"Ah, but I don't know *how* you can be so sure when you've no idea!"

Over this melancholy fact he pondered a second, silent.

Not five hours before, Miss Prangle had tearfully kissed Mrs. Halifax's hands and devotedly sworn eternal secrecy, and now



trembling lips, fluttering heart, were betrayers. She was breaking her oath with every panting breath she drew.

"My heavens!" illumined the radiant Halifax. "You *know*. You have an idea!" He forcibly put his hands over hers and looked her secret up from her heart. "Quick, quick, for God's sake, Miss Prangle! . . ."

("She'll never forgive me," murmured the girl.)

"Ah . . . *what* does that matter," was on his unlucky tongue, but he hurried it to . . . "how she will bless you!"

And, as she wavered, the office clock clanged out a half hour, marking a crisis in Miss Prangle's morals. She fairly shook his hands away. "But you will have to hurry!" she exclaimed. "Go at once!—Mrs. Halifax is leaving London, Charing Cross Station, at 11 o'clock. There, there, it is striking half-past ten."

Halifax was gone before the tears had time to fall over her cheeks. Miss Prangle stood still a few moments when he left her, her hands tightly clasped, and stared at the empty doorway. She had broken faith! "Criminal! Criminal!" her New England conscience called to her. "*Saint*," Mr. Halifax had breathed,



and Miss Prangle spent the next few days trying to reconcile the contradictory voices.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Robert Halifax, though unused to travel alone, very cleverly managed her solitary departure. She arrived early at Charing Cross, installed herself in the corner of a first-class carriage, and, according to what she remembered of wise travellers' means, she called the guard and gave him a generous fee to keep her alone.

"I will do my best, madam; it's a full morning, can't promise," and he shut her in.

Embarked on her singular voyage, at this moment the girl would have given worlds to undo her plan. She had found means to discover that Robert, his London affairs terminated, was on the eve of returning to America. She had no idea of remaining three thousand miles apart from him, although in reality the universe might be between their wedded lives. In spite of her father's letter, withdrawing his opposition, her heart was sore against Bagsby. She would have none of her people. "Oh no," and she murmured it now as she waited, "not until Robert and I have been together again and happy a long, long time."



What her arrival in Chicago would be was not a pleasing feature to consider. Her entry into the little household of Miss Prangle's relations, where she had decided to take temporary dwelling, was a gloomy, unlovely prospect to Violet Halifax. She could fly, of course, to Lillie Crawford-Crawford. Lillie adored her, and had been loyal to Robert throughout. There, too, was Miss Atkinson; and Violet warmed as she thought of Aunt Lydia Halifax, the gentle spinster who had come several times to see her during her short engagement.

"I can't go to any one," she concluded, resignedly, "dear as they are. I must hide myself in that little neutral household until my husband forgives me and comes to take me away."

Sitting far back in the corner of the travelling carriage, she was a slight, charming figure, arrayed in a very plain, dark dress, a disguising veil drawn down over her face. Appealing, attractive, she appeared made for nothing less than to venture forth alone, to tempt Fate and the world. She could not permit herself to realize that the train with its first grinding sweep would carry her from—her people, Robert! What irony of chance, should he determine *not* to go to America! She had a



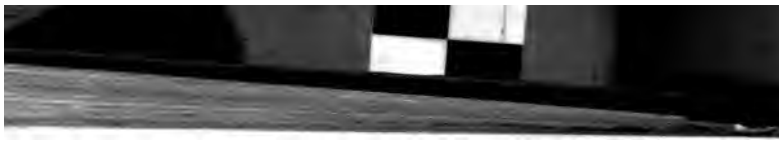
strong impulse to climb down, to dash back to London, to Cambridge Street, to the horrible possibility that West would come again to see her, to anything that would take her from this loneliness and fear.

On the platform the noise was increasing as the last passengers hurried to board the train and stow themselves away. She watched the inevitable good-byes until her heart ached. Luggage vans, hand trucks rolled heavily by to the noisy cries of porters and officials.

She remained undisturbed in her compartment, and in her unreasoning nervous state of caprice this annoyed her.

"I can't stay here all alone for hours," she thought; "it is too dreadfully dreary! They can put in any one they choose."

A passing official unlocked the door for her. She threw it wide and sat close to it, leaning forward, watching the leave-takers and leavings. But her sudden hospitality was scorned. The guard, well-disposed, warded off one by one the voyagers from sharing the well-paid-for seclusion of the pretty woman. She noticed at the last moment the hurrying figure of a tall man in a long, light overcoat. He was coming from the other end of the train, apparently seeking some one to whom he would bid



good-bye; he was looking in every window and searching every carriage. As he turned his agitated face towards her, and she saw him, she did not cry out or stretch forth greeting or summons. . . . She covered both hands over her heart, sinking back in her corner, for her hand had been on the door to close it, her slender figure well out of her lonely compartment. That she might see the last of the voyagers her disguising veil was lifted to her brow. She had seen and been seen. The man, finding evidently the object of his eager search, swung himself up on to the step of her carriage, climbed in, and closed the door.

Iron wheels made the dull, crunching sound of the beginning of departure. Violet's hands, prisoned fast in her husband's, vainly tried to make themselves free.

"Robert," she besought—"the man, the guard."

"Dearest!"

The warm, crimsoning wave, blotting her fair pallor, glowed under his caresses. She freed herself and in turn held his hands fast in hers.

"I beseech you, Robert," she pleaded, and the door was indeed opened, the guard appeared, looked at the two and discreetly understood.



Their tickets, being only two of a hundred, were soon disposed of; the official stepped down and shut the door upon the man and his wife.

The young girl held her husband back a little from her and regarded him with an expression of transfiguring love.

"Is this chance?" she whispered.

"No, no — Providence," he returned. "Chance has brought us too much ill."

"Why are you here, Robert?" she continued very low.

"Where else would I be, dearest?"

She shook her head, and the trembling tears fell from her lashes. "Ah, where indeed have you been?"

"Too long away," he confessed, "but I could not come to you poor, dishonored in your father's eyes."

She clung to the hand of his she held, and with her face pale and uplifted she scanned her husband's, reading it, possessing it, as though she would be mistress of every line, every expression.

"I came to seek you," he continued, tenderly, "to find you, to bring you fame and fortune."

"What are they to me?" she whispered.

"Your father withdrew his opposition; he wrote me to go to you and to claim you, but



you understand I was much too proud to rush in, a pauper, on such sudden-given joy. But to-day your father believes in me."

"What is that to me?" repeated the low voice.

It was all his control could achieve not to take her in his close embrace.

"And my past," her husband offered. "Every hour since the woman who has caused such grief crossed my life until to-day shall be yours, Violet."

Over the face of the girl at this reference to Mrs. Belford no change flickered.

"Dearest, my past is yours to read."

"Hush!" She sealed his lips with her hand. After a moment she said, "Didn't I prove when I came that night that not only I believed nothing but I cared nothing? I have always told you that I didn't care about the past. I really meant it, although that terrible jealousy made me for a moment waver. But," she added, "your future is my very life. Robert, I cannot say, 'What is that to me?' *Is* it mine?"

"As is this moment," he assured, and at her radiant content in his warm response he marvelled, greatly wondering at the difference between a man's love and a woman's. For as with each caress, each touch of her, she became

more irrevocably his, he grew conscious of an undying jealousy, one with his love for his wife. Stung by the miserable lash, its fire burning his lips even as they met hers, he bitterly accused himself, vainly endeavoring to silence the fatal questions. But, come what might, he must know! He let her draw away, and bent his head, looking down at the floor in very shame; then he said, in a veiled voice:

"I cannot speak as you do, Violet. Perhaps I am going to lose heaven by the hell which I shall create for myself, but I must know."

"What?" she asked, with infinite gentleness. "What must you know?"

He could not meet her eyes with his, where love and a dread of her past fought together, angel and demon.

"Oh, a man's nature is very different to a woman's," he weakly excused. "I must have your past as well as your present, as well as your future. I am nothing but a jealous lover. God knows I make no excuse for myself."

"Do you mean you want to know about Mr. West?"

"Yes."

"If," she returned, not hesitating, "I had only told you at the Astoria, that would have been a simple story! Patterfield West has



always cared for me, and before I saw you I had just told him that he might win me if he could. I did not love any one else, I did not think I ever *could;* you see, I did not know!" She sweetly apologized and smiled enchantingly, but her mood was too serious, and gravity instantly claimed her. "But he took this as a binding engagement — his letter showed that; and when I saw him on the night my father gave me to you, when I told him everything, as I frankly did, he felt so terribly that I could not but promise him—"

"*What*, Violet?" interrupted her inquisitor.

"—To keep his secret for him."

"And that is all?"

She sat quietly looking at her gloveless hands, turning her rings from side to side. A silence had fallen between them which the confidence did not warm to new emotion.

"No," she frankly said, lifting her eyes to him and making for the breach—"no, it is not all."

Her husband grew pale as death, and she put out her hands over his as though to help him bear what she should say.

"You have only yourself to blame, Robert, and if you were to suffer, you could only blame yourself—but Fate has been good to you!"



And then she told him in every detail of West's visit to her in Cambridge Street, and at the close she turned her eyes from him to the window and the mist-veiled, flying scene.

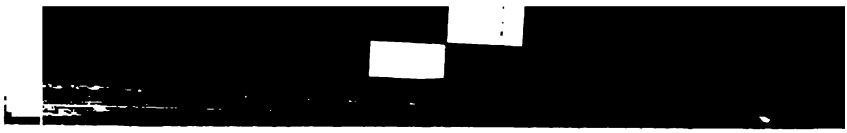
"Why did you leave me so long?" she murmured. "You have got my full confession"—she made a little gesture—"but you thrust me from your very arms, Robert. I wonder, sometimes I marvel, that you have not more to hear. If I had loved you, oh, ever so little less!"

He made a low exclamation, devoutly thankful, devoutly loving, and caught her to his heart.

"Have you forgiven me?" she whispered. "You had much to forgive. I have always remembered it."

Violet leaned her arm in its dark coat-sleeve on the window-ledge, the fur of her cuff closing soft around her wrist, and on her hand she rested her head. Halifax, sitting a little forward, turned full towards his wife, talking to her, watching her, absorbed by her loveliness.

They were dashing past long, level miles of barren fields; brown, upturned stretches of winter earth; clumps of dark, leafless trees extended their moist, fine branches into the delicate atmosphere. All was enveloped by the



pale February sunlight, cold, warming towards noon. Here and there on a mound of earth, here and there on a forest's border, lay patches of snow, the last of winter's mantle so surely slipping away from the earth, as it warmed to the embrace of spring. There was something in the last of winter, in the barren ruggedness of the mother country, that appealed strangely to the spirits in the breasts of these children of the West. The earth's heart held treasures of summer and of harvest to be, but the fulness of time was yet to come, the land lay wrapped in infinite repose. No signs of life marked the flying distances, and the landscape was a setting, still colorless, a sympathetic background for the vibrant, human passion, for the sight to rest upon, as the lovers turned their eyes from time to time to the impersonal brown and golden world of field and wood.

Misery, absence, the crossing of their wedded lives with the fate and fortunes of friend and foe, only served in this moment to more closely draw them together; and in the union of their hands and lips, in the close tenderness of their embrace, was born that confidence without which no love is perfect, and by whose death the greatest love is shipwrecked.

"Do you realize," Halifax asked, "that this



is the first time in our honeymoon since the Astoria that we have been alone and at peace?"

"Yes," she laughed. "I also remember how much I paid the guard to keep you from joining me!"

But again she insisted, "How in the world did you know where I was? *How* did you find me out?"

He hesitated a moment, wishing to shield the traitor.

But she had guessed. "Oh, Miss Prangle!" she exclaimed. "Dear, dear little thing."

"Well, I'm glad you are so kind!" laughed her husband. "A woman is known by the secrets she keeps, they say, and I shall give all mine to Miss Prangle and label them 'to be kept at discretion!'"

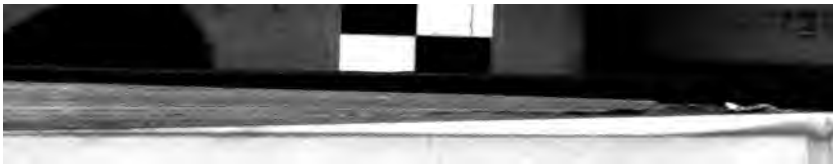
"I would not have believed it of her," mused Mrs. Halifax.

"My dear child! You don't *blame* her?"

"Oh, I mean to say," corrected Violet, "I should not have thought she was *clever* enough!"

"Which proves how little we expect from those to whom we give our heart's confidence," murmured Robert.

"We must send her a telegram from Dover," planned the bride. "Please give me your



pencil and we will write it out together—a telegram of blessing and forgiveness."

"And one to your people," added Halifax.

The girl's face softened, grew tender, and she smiled under a touch of gentle humor.

"Yes, a telegram to my father, of blessing and forgiveness," said Bagsby's daughter.





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